

*20th Century
American
Literature:*

*A Soviet
View*



How do today's Soviet critics see American literature? Which figures and events in it do they regard as of key importance? Which aspects of American literature arouse their warmest affection—and which do they reject? How do they rate the prospects for its development? These are some of the questions which this anthology attempts to answer. The writings it contains are the work of Soviet specialists in American literature, for

whom the study of their subject is both an occupation and a calling. The contributions represent the thinking of different generations and differ in composition, style and technique, but all share a common feature: profound respect for the democratic tradition which has characterized United States literature since its very beginnings. This anthology was prepared by the literary history section of Progress Publishers to mark the 200th anniversary of America's statehood.

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PROGRESS PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW

Translated from the Russian by *RONALD UROON*
Designed by *VLADIMIR AN*

ЛИТЕРАТУРА США XX ВЕКА
СОВЕТСКИЙ ВЗГЛЯД
Сборник статей
На английском языке

First printing 1976

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Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

70202—1005
014(01)—76 73—76

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I

Y. KOVALEV

PREFACE*

The study of classical and contemporary American literature is a recent but rapidly developing branch of Soviet philology. In January 1975 Moscow witnessed the first all-Union conference on American studies devoted to American literature and journalism. For the first time Soviet scholars and critics in the field of American literature convened to evaluate the results, primary goals and perspectives of their work. It was an inspiring sight. With satisfaction and perhaps some astonishment they realized how numerous were their colleagues and how great the scope of classical and modern American literary studies in the universities and scholarly institutes of the Soviet Union.

A characteristic and, as I see it, encouraging feature of the conference was that the bulk of its participants were not venerable professors approaching the end of their academic careers but young graduate students whose scholarly path is only beginning. Evidently a fruitful future awaits American studies in this country.

Soviet scholarship in the field of American literature is a relatively young phenomenon. For all practical pur-

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poses its planned energetic development began in 1947 when a group of scholars from the Academy of Sciences' Gorky Institute of World Literature collaborated on the first Russian *History of American Literature*, and Professor M. P. Alekseyev offered a special course on early American literature at Leningrad University.

This is not to say that Soviet critics had never before studied the works of American writers. Today we recall with gratitude the efforts of such pioneers in Soviet American studies as S. Dinamov, A. Startsev, A. Elistratova and I. Kashkin, among other critics and translators. During the twenties and thirties they strove to keep Soviet readers informed of events in the American literary world. They never tired of writing critical surveys, essays and reviews on the latest phenomena of American literature while at the same time attempting to discern major trends in its development. Their interest was almost exclusively concentrated on contemporary literature although from time to time they penned short studies of the classics.

These critics and translators wrote neither general studies nor fundamental monographs. This was only natural. Soviet literary scholarship in difficult times forged a new methodology based on Marxist-Leninist philosophy. As we all know maturity does not come quickly. Furthermore the epoch called for scholars to focus their attention on the literary life and its struggles going on around them.

One could count the books on American literature and writers written in Russia during the preceding 150 years on the fingers of one hand. There simply was no purposeful systematic study of the historical process of America's literary development. American studies was not a recognized university discipline.

After the Second World War this state of affairs underwent a decisive change. Today books on the history of American literature and monographs on the most significant American writers written by Soviet specialists are reckoned in dozens, and articles—in hundreds. A signifi-

cant percentage of candidate and doctoral dissertations are being written on problems of the history of American literature. Hundreds of students throughout the country are writing bachelor's theses dealing with American writers and works. Almost all universities and pedagogical institutes with an English department offer general and specialized courses in American literature. Specialized publishing houses regularly supply students with textbooks on the history of American literature and anthologies of the works of American writers not only in translation but in the original. Among the centres for the study of American literature that have arisen are the Institute of World Literature, Moscow University, Leningrad University and the University of the Kuban (in Krasnodar). Of course the study of American literature is not restricted to these centres. Specialists in American literature work at many other institutions. But these centres have each taken on distinctive features of "schools" and their research is more specialized.

The rapid ascent of American studies in the Soviet Union would be unthinkable without a firm basis; this is provided by the longstanding interest taken by Russians in America—its people, history, culture and literature. The root of this interest lies in the eighteenth century, the epoch of the American bourgeois revolution and the War of Independence: events which first drew the attention of progressive Russians to the young republic across the sea, to its struggle and the activities of its most prominent citizens. The distance between Russia and America was great: all Europe and the Atlantic Ocean. There were no means of communication. For a time Russian society was obliged to content itself with obscure rumors and information gleaned from England and France. Eventually Russia began to receive more trustworthy and extensive reports. The fundamental documents of the American revolution, the works of Franklin, Paine and Jefferson, became accessible. Russian proponents of enlightenment evaluated the works of their American colleagues. Radishchev, for example, characterized Franklin's political and

scholarly achievements paraphrasing the well-known sterling phrase: "He who hath wrested the thunder from the sky and the scepters from the hands of *kings*."

The initial interest in life in the United States came to a head in the nineteenth century. With the establishment of diplomatic relations the Russian public began to receive firsthand information. Today, apart from specialists and historians, few people recall the work of the first Russian diplomats in America. Nevertheless it is worthy of note. Among them were men who saw their duties not only in terms of diplomatic service but primarily in terms of acquainting their countrymen with America and Americans. One such figure was the artist and writer P. P. Svinin who served first as a translator and subsequently as secretary to the Russian General Consul in Philadelphia (1809-1813). As a result of his four-year stay in the United States there appeared a series of essays, watercolors and a book *A Pictorial Journey through North America* published in St. Petersburg in 1815. His colleague P. I. Poletika made two trips to the United States, initially in the capacity of an adviser to the Russian mission in Philadelphia (1810-1811) and subsequently as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary in Washington (1819-1822). Poletika wrote a book about the internal affairs of the United States and a "memoir" about Russo-American relations. His book was translated into English and published in Boston in 1826. Poletika's essays were published in Russian periodicals and were extremely popular among readers. His contribution to the development of Russo-American relations was acknowledged not only in Russia but in America as well where he was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society established by Franklin. J. A. Wallenstein, adviser to the Russian mission in Washington, was also an extraordinary man. This diplomat, historian, meteorologist and writer enjoyed great popularity among Americans. For his scholarly and literary contributions he was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston in 1828 and a member of the

Philosophical Society in Philadelphia in 1830. Wallenstein contributed to the *North American Review* and the *American Quarterly Review* and corresponded with such American historians and political figures as Daniel Webster, Jared Sparks, and Edward Everett. Interested American scholars can examine Wallenstein's manuscripts, such as *Sketches of a Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* or *Remarks on the Causes and Principles of the Alliance Between France and the United States, 1778* in the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

Gradually Russian readers attained a more detailed and precise idea of the realities of American life. They came to realize the sharp contradictions and profound internal conflicts inherent in American society. Pre-reform Russia moving toward the abolition of serfdom followed the activities of American abolitionists with interest and sympathy. Oddly enough 1861 was a turning point in the history of both states: Russia adopted reform leading to the abolition of serfdom and the American Civil War, also to lead to the abolition of slavery, began.

There are many testaments to the Russians' keen interest in developments in the United States toward the mid-nineteenth century. One of the most vivid documents is the series of essays and surveys written by the leader of the Russian revolutionary democrats N. G. Chernyshevsky and published in the journal *Sovremennik*, an attentive analysis of the political struggle in America, the measures taken by President Lincoln and the military operations at the Civil War front.

Russia sympathized actively with the North in its struggle to liberate the slaves. It refused to take part in a military expedition organized by England and France to aid the South. In 1863, two Russian naval squadrons paid a friendly visit to New York and San Francisco demonstrating Russia's open support for the North. Many Russian volunteers fought in the Northern ranks and one of the Illinois volunteer corps was commanded by the Russian colonel Ivan Vasilyevich Turchaninov who entered

American war annals under the name of John Basil Turchin.

It is hardly necessary here to go into the further history of Russo-American relations or the Russian view of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This is all recent history and its particulars are more or less well known. Our main intent here was to establish the sympathetic interest on the part of Russian society with regard to life in the United States, and the fate of the American people; this was the basis for their concentrated attention to the literary life of the United States.

The Russian reading public and literary critics manifested an interest in American literature at the moment when American writers were first acknowledged by Europe. It could be put in another way: when the first serious works of art constituting the cornerstone of American national literature appeared. We find evidence of this interest on two levels: in publications of the works of American authors in Russian journals and in separate editions, and in the writings of Russian poets and critics fascinated by the literature of the New World.

Pushkin, as is well known, was quite attentive to American authors and particularly praised Washington Irving. Irving's influence is easy to trace in "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel", and "The Story of the Village of Goryukhino". Lermontov loved and respected James Fenimore Cooper and preferred his works to the novels of Walter Scott. One of the most outstanding Russian critics and thinkers of the nineteenth century, Vissarion Belinsky, was of a similar opinion. Belinsky wrote a series of essays giving a superb analysis of Cooper's creative principles and of the genres in which he wrote. Accordingly Belinsky was drawn into the polemic on the correlation between the works of Cooper and Scott which raged in American and European literary periodicals. Scott's work, as the reader will recall, was extraordinarily popular in Europe and America. American critics were proud to call Cooper "the American Scott". This enraged Cooper. He had no intention of imitating

his colleagues and insisted on the originality of his novels. He went so far as to write several novels based on European history so as to demonstrate his distance from the Scottish novelist. Today there can be no doubt that Cooper was right, although he did learn a great deal from Scott. Cooper was, however, obliged to wear himself out in order to prove his independence. It is interesting to note that Belinsky supported Cooper in this dispute. In his review on *The Bravo* he writes: "Cooper appeared after Walter Scott and is considered by many people to be his imitator and disciple. This is absurd: Cooper is an utterly original writer and is just as great a genius as the Scottish novelist. As one of a few first-rate, great artists he has created the sort of characters who will forever remain artistic types. . . . Furthermore as a citizen of a young nation that has arisen in a young land that does not resemble our old world he has been in a position to create a new kind of novel: the American saga of the prairies and the sea."¹

In another essay Belinsky stresses that Walter Scott should not be compared to Cooper, nor should Cooper be compared to Scott: each of them is great in his own way, each highly original, and the works of each belong to the great art of the world.²

Belinsky often got carried away. One can hardly agree today with his evaluation of *The Pathfinder* as "a Shakespearian drama written in novel form". But on the whole he was correct in representing the works of Cooper and Irving as part of American national literature to the Russian reader. We should note that at that time the majority of European critics continued to view Irving as an English writer and to dismiss Cooper's novels as imitations of Scott's historical novels; American critics were far from convinced of the existence of American national literature.

In the mid-nineteenth century Russia was already well-informed on the state of literature in the United States and in the future continued to follow the literary development of America with great attentiveness. For the Russian

reader in the first half of the nineteenth century American literature consisted mainly of the works of Cooper and of other romantic writers. The second half of the century was dominated by Mark Twain and the realists.

There is a certain parallelism in the literary development of Russia and America; naturally there could be no total coincidence. Both literatures evolved aesthetically and stylistically from enlightenment and classicism to romanticism and then to critical realism, a fact which made it far easier for the Russian reader to appreciate the artistic values of American writers' work. This is further justified by the fact that the Russian artistic consciousness was always somewhat ahead of the American with regard to methodological questions, and while American romanticism was at its zenith, Russia was already re-evaluating romantic aesthetics from a realistic perspective.

This explains the acutely critical attitude of Chernyshevsky toward Cooper. He judged Cooper's works from the position of realist aesthetics and found no artistic merit in them whatsoever. Here he was in complete agreement with Twain who judged Cooper from just such a perspective and came to the same conclusions.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the interest of the Russian reading public and critics in American literature became as constant and traditional as their interest in French, English or German literature. Now American literature is no longer apprehended as something new, unusual or exotic but as one significant phenomenon among other national literatures of the world. This is evidenced by the many translations and lively interest taken in any new work published in the United States as well as by the efforts to fill in the gaps of the past. Russian readers missed the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe and Longfellow; their knowledge of Hawthorne was extremely limited. In the early twentieth century Ivan Bunin made a magnificent translation of *The Song of Hiawatha*, and Konstantin Balmont dedicated several years of his creative life to preparing the first collected works of Edgar Poe in Russian. To this day no one has surpassed his trans-

lations of Poe's verse. Indeed they may be among the poet's finest works. At this time Russian translations of some works of Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman also appeared.

The Great October Socialist Revolution marked a turning point in the Russian view of American literature. The swift, total elimination of illiteracy, the abrupt elevation of the cultural level of the masses and the new democratic politics in publishing had important consequences. The audience quickly expanded, and this inevitably led to the expansion and intensification of publishing.

From that time on large editions of the works of major American authors were issued. Today it is difficult to count the Soviet editions and re-editions of the books of Cooper, Twain, Jack London, Dreiser, Hemingway, Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, O. Henry, Steinbeck and other American writers. A bibliography of Russian translations of American literature would fill a whole volume. It would not be amiss at this point to mention such Soviet literary journals as *Novy Mir*, *Zvezda*, *Znamya*, *Oktyabr* and *Neva*; it would be hard to find a thick monthly periodical which had not published the works of American authors and critical essays on American literature. A special part is played by the journal *Inostrannaya Literatura* already celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. Soviet readers are acquainted with the latest American literature primarily through this journal. Recent years have witnessed a new trend towards greater interest in American literature. Now the Russian reader is not only attracted by artistic works of American writers but by the interpretations of the literary process made by American critics. Recently Russian editions of *Main Currents in American Thought* by Vernon Louis Parrington, some works of Van Wyck Brooks, selected essays of Francis Otto Matthiessen and Philip S. Foner's monograph on Mark Twain have been published among others. As far as I know Soviet publishing houses plan to issue Russian translations of Robert Spiller's *Literary History of the United States*, and Francis Otto Matthiessen's *American*

Renaissance. The Russian public is known for its broad-minded internationalism based on the assimilation of the riches of world culture, and this is one source of the profundity and significance of Russian national culture, literature and art.

Russians respond to American or any other foreign literature in a special way which, while not exclusively Russian, does characterize the Russian public on the whole. There are two stages: acquaintanceship, the first contact, and then assimilation, the transformation of an artistic phenomenon born of alien soil into a fact of the Russian consciousness and of Russian spiritual life.

We often speak of the "Russian Shakespeare", the "Russian Dickens", the "Russian Twain", which is not the same thing as when American critics called Cooper "the American Walter Scott". "The Russian Jack London" is not a Russian writer whose works are similar to Jack London's but the history of Russian translations, of stagings, screenplays and critical reviews of London's works. In other words this takes in the entire complex of their existence in the Russian national milieu. In that sense we also have a Russian Cooper, a Russian Twain, a Russian Poe, a Russian Melville and a Russian Hemingway.

The ideas and images of American literature, as of any literature, become part of the spiritual world of Russians. One could find many examples of this. We will confine ourselves to citing the words of Gorky: "As we read the memoirs of, for example, Russian revolutionaries, we often find indications that the books of Cooper fostered in them certain emotions, honor, courage and a love of action."

American literature has often been so intensively assimilated that some American writers are "resettled" in Russia. I haven't the slightest doubt that Cooper, London, Twain and perhaps even Hemingway have more readers in Russia now than in the United States. The bibliography appended to this book will bear witness to that.

All I have said above should clarify the reasons for the possibilities of swift development of American studies and

show how the study of American literary history and of contemporary American literature has become an important area of Soviet philology.

Naturally this book cannot give its readers a total awareness of Soviet scholarship on American literature if only because it is limited to research on twentieth-century American literature. The authors of the essays here presented are only a few of the specialists studying American literature in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless it does give some idea of the current state of Soviet American studies.

Among the contributors is the "elder" of Soviet American studies, one of the pioneers of the study of American literature in this country, the author of many books and essays on the history of American literature, scholar, critic, and translator M. O. Mendelson. He is the sole representative of the old guard of scholars in American studies. Others who might have been included are A. Anikst, M. Alekseyev, A. Startsev, and the late A. Elistratova and R. Samarin.

The next generation of Soviet scholars in American studies now, alas, already called "older" includes R. Orlova, Y. Zasursky, and G. Zlobin among other contributors to the book. A. Mulyarchik, N. Anastasyev, A. Zverev and B. Gilenson represent the younger generation. Naturally the concepts of "older" and "younger" are relative and one cannot always establish a clear boundary between generations. This is further complicated by the fact that many of those belonging to the younger generation are not young and many of the older generation not all that old. In a few years the members of the "younger" generation will become the "older" generation. In a certain sense they could be already considered part of the "older" generation since a new generation is growing up which has let itself be known through books and essays, some of them quite praiseworthy.

There are three sections to the collection. The first contains more general essays dealing with the genres and movements of contemporary American literature. The second section includes historical studies of single works,

cycles of works and at times the complete works of certain American writers of the first half of our century. The third section contains reviews. Some of them deal with books written by Soviet scholars of American studies. The rest deal with recent works of American writers.

As it happens all these essays were written by Muscovites. This was not intentional. But the majority of scholars specializing in American literature live in Moscow. Moscow is the location of the academic Institute of the United States and Canadian Studies, the Institute of World Literature, Moscow University, and two pedagogical institutes—there are specialists in American studies everywhere. Moscow publishes the major literary journals and publishing houses are concentrated in Moscow (including Progress Publishers who put out this collection). Moscow is the largest center in the country for the study of American literature and a collection of the works of Moscow specialists on that subject is quite accurate in its representation of the field. But let the American reader not forget that specialists on American literature may be found in cities other than Moscow, that there are other centers and other schools also mentioned, by the way, at the beginning of this brief preface.

NOTES

¹ V. G. Belinsky, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Academy of Sciences, 1954, Vol. III, p. 158 (in Russian).

² *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 458.

AMERICAN LITERATURE AND TWO REVOLUTIONS*

From time immemorial mankind has dreamed about happiness. Many centuries before Christ the poets of Babylon and ancient Egypt sang of man's efforts to reach out toward the sun and its light. Beginning with Hesiod and his idea of a "golden age", the poets of antiquity glorified the struggle for happiness as the deepest expression of man's very essence. The literature of the Renaissance, an epoch which, as Engels wrote, "called for giants and produced giants"—giants in power of thought, passion and character, was imbued with the idea of the individual's emancipation on the road to happiness and perfection. Finally, the great French representatives of the eighteenth century Enlightenment assigned a central role in their philosophy to the idea of the "natural man" and his efforts to understand the character of truth and justice. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous treatise, "*Si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs*", one of the earliest proclamations of the French Enlightenment, begins with lines that are echoed in pamphlets and speeches composed during the American and French revolutions:

"What an exquisite and majestic sight—to see man arising, as it were, out of non-existence through his own

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efforts, sending forth the light of reason to dispel the darkness that nature has shrouded around him, rising above himself, striving in spirit toward the heavens, transcending in thought the great expanses of the universe with the speed of a ray of sunlight, and, what is still grander and more difficult, delving deep into himself in order to study man and his nature, his obligations and his role in life.”¹

Two hundred years have passed since Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, in which we find the embodiment of man’s ancient dream of a free people living in happiness and plenty, a dream which has subsequently been rather grandly termed “The American Dream”. To this very day historians and jurists, writers and critics quote the words of this declaration, which have had such an impact on social and political thought throughout the world:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”²

In that distant epoch which saw the first settlers establishing themselves on the American continent, and then in the heroic epoch of the American Revolution, the dream arose of that special path which fate had in store for America.

If in the past century the “American Dream” had some historical and social foundation in fact (though even then the most perspicacious minds saw how illusory the dream really was), in our time the utopian essence of this idea is beyond question. Recall Norman Mailer’s headline-making novel, *An American Dream*, or Edward Albee’s play, *The American Dream*, both of which demonstrate the evolution which the dream has undergone in modern times. In his book, *The Greening of America*, the well-known American sociologist, Charles Reich, expressed his views

on this subject with perfect frankness and clarity: "To the American people of 1789, their nation promised a new way of life; each individual a free man, each having the right to seek his own happiness; a republican form of government in which the people would be sovereign; and no arbitrary power over people's lives. Less than two hundred years later, almost every aspect of the dream has been lost."³

But we are interested primarily in the manner in which American literature reflects this dramatic evolution.

The literary heritage of the United States remains a vital factor in the artistic development of the country. The traditions of national American culture and literature have been in existence from the epoch of the American Revolution. In posing the question of the essence of a national literature and culture in the United States, contemporary American critics occasionally revert to the conservative opinions expressed by men of letters in the distant and not-so-distant past. Hence the wide circulation given to the views of Ezra Pound in his literary manifesto on national culture written in 1938 and several times reprinted. Pound maintains that the national culture of the United States existed from 1770 to 1861, and perished in the course of the Civil War. He views American culture as Anglo-French in origin, and thus holds that when this European source dried up, being replaced by realistic and democratic tendencies which developed as a result of the Civil War, national American culture ceased to exist. The flowering of realism as manifest in Walt Whitman's and Mark Twain's works for Pound could only signify the demise of American literature and culture, and American writers would henceforth have no choice but to emigrate to Europe, as Pound himself did: "After the debacle of American culture individuals had to emigrate in order to conserve such fragments of American culture as had survived."⁴

From its very inception American literature and culture developed along two lines, reflecting two fundamental tendencies of national historical development.

At the wellsprings of American democratic literature we find the works of Philip Freneau, a heroic figure surrounded by the romance of the War of Independence. Among the outstanding representatives of this line of development are James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, John Reed, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and many others who rank among the best sons of the American people.

America's other culture also had its own tradition, represented by the literature of the Loyalists during the American Revolution and that of the Federalist-aristocrats in the post-revolutionary period. This culture is also represented by the literature of the Southern rebels of the Civil War period. And just as the democratic quality of Freneau's works provoked the open hostility of those who represented the opposing culture, so too the works of John Reed and Theodore Dreiser were slighted by the McCarthies of the literary world.

American critics love to quote the words of J. Hector Saint-John (de Crèvecoeur), a naturalized American from France, who two hundred years ago, during the revolution, set forth the following definition of the true American: "What, then, is the American, this new man? He is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced." Saint-John's idea formed the basis for a sense of national self-awareness, of the "American Dream", though the concept as such crystallized only in the thirties of our century.

A truly national poetry was born when the farmers and soldiers of Washington's army saw that the thoughts and aspirations expressed by Freneau and the whole galaxy of American revolutionary poets were similar to their own thoughts and aspirations. A truly national prose was born when the simple American man started reading Cooper's novels and when other works of American romanticism also entered the consciousness of the newly arrived voyager.

The problem of the American literary tradition has long

attracted the attention of writers and critics. Cooper once described in precise terms the meaning and the task of his historical novels set in medieval Europe (*The Bravo*, *The Heidenmauer*, or *the Benedictines*, *The Headsman*, or *the Abbaye des Vignerons*): he intended them, he said, as an attempt to discuss European facts from an American point of view. In his essay on Pushkin, N. V. Gogol, as we know, made a similar observation in defining the essence of a truly national poet: "A poet may be called national in character even when he describes a completely alien world, but looks at it from the perspective of his national element, the perspective of the people, when he feels and speaks in such a way that his compatriots experience the illusion that they themselves are feeling and speaking."

By no means all critics, either past or present, have been able to comprehend the unique national character of American romanticism. In his introduction to an anthology of American literature of the "golden age" (which for the writer means American romanticism), the well-known American literary critic Perry Miller asserts: "Irving . . . was wholly derived from eighteenth century English writers and he offered little in style or tone which could be called uniquely American, even though he did deploy the landscape of the Hudson River in 'Rip Van Winkle' . . . Though he used American scenery, Cooper owed his whole conception of the narrative function to European romances. Though he fumed when he was called 'the American Scott' we can readily discern that without Scott's border and medieval tales we should never have had Natty Bumppo. In this decade William Cullen Bryant published his most energetic verses. Though these resolutely portrayed American scenery—'Monument Mountain' instead of Helvellyn—they exhibited toward the countryside attitudes that might have been formed in the Lake Country."⁵

While taking note of the actual ties between American and English literature, Perry Miller fails to note what is specifically national in the works of Irving, Cooper and

Bryant. The traditional parallels and general similarities seem more important to the critic than what is inherently American about the works under discussion.

The processes involved in the creation of a national literature and the establishment of literary self-awareness, despite all the interconnections between these phenomena, are not identical processes and they do not always take place simultaneously. It would hardly be just to suppose that the appearance of the greatest works in American literature (Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Thoreau's *Walden* or Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*) in and of itself mechanically resolved the problem of the rise of literary self-awareness in the United States. Aesthetic self-awareness began forming already during the War of Independence; it continued to take shape throughout the nineteenth century and it was only in the second decade of our century that it assumed its definitive form on a large scale.

Let us remember that for an extended period of time American literature was regarded abroad as simply a branch of English literature. Soviet Academician M. P. Alekseyev remarks that the very term "American literature" arose fairly recently. At least until the eighties of the past century European literary criticism employed this designation infrequently and haphazardly. In the second decade of the past century the American man of letters Samuel Knapp testified in his introduction to *Lectures on American Literature* that foreigners did not acknowledge the existence of a literature one might call "American". And even a century later the American critic Barrete Clark wrote in Maxim Gorky's journal, *Beseda*: "Right up until before the war the attitude of educated Europeans toward American attempts to establish a national culture of their own was at best kindly condescending, if not even openly unsympathetic."

The fact that American literary criticism conclusively affirmed the notion of American literature as an independent entity was due in large measure to the works of Van Wyck Brooks and V. L. Parrington. Brooks' *America's*

Coming of Age (1915) together with Parrington's three-volume opus, *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927-1930) laid the foundation for the scientific investigation of the specifically national character of American literature.

But even today one can hear statements similar to that once made by a French critic. He saw among the definitive qualities of American literature its energetic character, its glorification of physical strength and a dramatic form of narration, by which he meant the depiction of characters by means of actions and direct speech, without authorial commentary; on this basis he declared that "'American' is not so much a nationality as a style".⁶ Some English critics also speak of the current existence of a national American literature with a certain degree of reservation. "The English reader may accept my assumption that there is such a thing as American literature, and concede that American writers . . . have managed surprisingly well with their mixed-up heritage"⁷—such is the rather odd sounding sentence which introduces one of Marcus Cunliffe's arguments in his essay on the history of American literature, published in 1954 and reprinted more than once.

Already at the time of the American Revolution poets and publicists of the young nation were dreaming about the creation of a national epos, an *American Iliad* or *Chanson de Roland*. It was fated to some degree that these aspirations be fulfilled in the American novel. It is significant that in 1820—the very year that Sidney Smith, founder of the *Edinburgh Review*, was ironically asking, "Who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?"—Cooper's first novel was published, and within only a few years American novels were being read throughout Europe, from Petersburg to Madrid.

There is a tendency in American criticism to assign the beginnings of a national literature only to the period of Irving, Cooper and Bryant. Occasionally, the names of lesser writers—James K. Paulding, John Neal, Fitz-Greene

Halleck and others—are added to this “trinity” of American romantics who began to write earlier than Hawthorne, Melville and Poe, and are therefore called “early romantics”.

This sort of periodization is reflected in the massive *Literature of the American People* (1951), edited by Arthur Hobson Quinn. In this work—designed, according to the editor’s express intention, for the widest possible audience—the literature composed during the Revolutionary War years is assigned to the colonial period, i.e., to the period before the United States achieved nationhood. The vital threads which tie the American romantics to the literary tradition of revolutionary times are artificially broken, which makes the flowering of romanticism on American soil look like an inexplicable caprice, an unexpected miracle in the literary life of the United States.

This sort of tendency can be seen in the Macmillan anthology, *Literary Heritage*, published in several volumes. In the first, *The Early Period of American Literature*, the beginnings of national literature are connected only with the works of Irving, Cooper and Bryant, who are called “the first American writers”. In one of the most influential books of contemporary American criticism, Howard Mumford Jones’ *The Theory of American Literature*, we also find the author bypassing the historical role of American Revolutionary literature, and especially that of Freneau’s works, in the formation of a national literature.

This position—one which characterizes many representatives of contemporary bourgeois literary studies—should be set off against consistently historical view of the complex fate of American literature, which was born amidst the fires of the War of Independence.

At the dawn of American literature, when the term itself first entered the vocabulary of those living in the former English colonies who had just cast off the authority of the British crown, the poet of the American Revolution and the first truly national poet, Philip Freneau,

was speaking of the great task of battling for literary independence. Foreseeing the countless difficulties that would be encountered on the way, Freneau wrote with sorrow that he would not live to see the day when American literature would be truly free. "A political and literary independence of this nation being two very different things," he wrote in his "Advice to Author", "the first was accomplished in about seven years, the latter will be completely effected, perhaps, in as many centuries."

As the national character of American literature came to be recognized, a new, romantic tendency began to develop. For that reason discussions about national literature in fact often proved to be polemics about American romanticism, its virtues and faults, its right to an independent existence. Romanticism became the whetstone on which the specific national character of the literature was sharpened. In the post-revolutionary period, when the foundations of the American political system were being laid, American romantics were the first to feel and reflect in their works their uneasiness regarding the social imperfections of the new state.

A characteristic feature of early romanticism in the United States was the complex interweaving of revolutionary classical and romantic tendencies. During the entire period that marked the establishment of a national American literature, the synthesis of classicism and romanticism was the most important problem of artistic development.

The romantic century in America begins with Freneau. As the romantic tradition develops in the United States, we observe discontinuities which divide Freneau's early romantic poetry and the works of Bryant, Irving and Cooper.

In the course of its almost century-long existence, American romantic art evolved in a complex fashion, from the patriotic declarations of the colonists who rebelled against the English yoke to the programs for a democratic revolutionary art written by the most consistent support-

ers of abolitionism and by uncompromising critics of the bourgeois American system. Despite their wide range of styles and their varying attitudes to American public life, the romantics each in their own way criticized the anti-human aspects of the social order established with the victory of the American Revolution.

Cooper and Poe, Irving and Melville, Thoreau and Emerson—how dissimilar these writers are, how contradictory at times their views on many vital problems confronting Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century. But there is one feature fundamental to each of these writers which permits us to view their works as phenomena representing a single movement in art and literature. That feature is the romantic protest against capitalist America, the tendency to “idealize the negation of the bourgeois way of life”, as the Russian Marxist G. V. Plekhanov called the art of romanticism.

Many books and essays have been written in which American and English critics search for the features common to romantic writers in their Christian outlook on life (*American Classics Reconsidered. A Christian Appraisal*, edited by H. C. Gardiner, New York, 1958); the “new criticism” finds similarities in the formal devices used by American writers in the first half of the nineteenth century.

But these are not the most important similarities. The most important is the great dream which inspired the work of the romantics. For Thoreau the dream found its embodiment in the image of Walden; Melville led his hero into the open spaces of the Pacific Ocean; Cooper searched for his ideal hero in the wild forests of the American West; Poe’s lyrical hero struggled to find beauty and justice. And they all experienced failure and disappointment, for the dream was as distant from reality as El-dorado was for Poe’s knight:

*But he grew old—
This knight so bold—*

*And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.*

When Cooper came out with his famous pamphlet, *The American Democrat*, he was accused of being unpatriotic. It was not by chance that H. L. Mencken, in his preface to one of the editions of *The American Democrat*, noted how up-to-date this great writer's work sounded in its condemnation of pseudo-democracy: "His warnings were gloomy, but the event was always gloomier still. He was dead ten years when the Civil War finally blew the old Republic to pieces, and brought in that hegemony of the ignorant and-ignoble which yet afflicts us."⁸

On the eve of the Civil War, the increasingly acute situation on the social and political front and the growth of the democratic movement were accompanied by a rise in national literature. On the other hand, chauvinistic tendencies were growing more and more persistent on the southern plantations. Advocates of regional or "sectional" literature proclaimed that the only true American literature was that of individual localities. Even an original literary motto made its appearance in the South: "To be American means to be sectional."

William Gilmore Simms emerged as an advocate of the Southerners' literary and social ideas, both of which based on separatist tendencies. Simms reduces the problem of national literature to the task of creating a sectional literature: "If we do not make our work national, it will be because we shall fail in making it sectional."

Other moods held sway in the North. Writers here did not presume to create a separate literature for Massachusetts, Pennsylvania or even New England, for they believed that their works extended beyond the narrow framework of these regions and expressed common features of the national character.

The years 1837-1855 stand out as one of the brightest periods in the struggle for a national American literature;

they span the period between the time when Emerson delivered his famous speech, "The American Scholar", to the appearance of Whitman's preface to *Leaves of Grass*, where the problem of national literature acquires a more pronounced democratic ring.

American literary historians call Emerson's "The American Scholar" the "declaration of American literary independence". Basing his views on the history of mankind's development, Emerson calls on Americans to create their own national poetry.

Emerson's speech made an unforgettable impression on his literary descendants and played an historical role in the formation of the literary self-consciousness of the American nation. This was due above all to the fact that Emerson rejected dead literary traditions, turning instead to a live, effective principle in American life. He affirmed that the birth of literature in America must reflect the people's faith in their own powers of creation: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat."

The fate of American literature constantly excited the transcendentalists—Emerson, Thoreau and others. Their literary and critical theories reflected the tremendous creative possibilities that lay at the foundation of America's new literature. Even before Whitman we find a distinguished participant in the transcendentalist circle, Margaret Fuller, noting the relationship between the problem of national literature and the state of American society, especially with respect to its degree of democratization.

The development of a national literature in the nineteenth century is closely bound up with the whole democratic struggle, with the abolitionist movement and the growth of the farmers' movement. It is true, of course, that the Mexican-American war, territorial expansion and the Spanish-American war—all of them marking the beginning of the epoch of American imperialism—occa-

sioned the rise of chauvinistic sentiments in certain literary circles. At the same time anti-militaristic tendencies grew and began to spread. Consider the angry, anti-imperialistic pamphlets of Mark Twain. The expansion of the American frontier to the West, accompanied by the ravaging and exterminating of Indian tribes, was identified in chauvinistic criticism, and with particular success in the religious and missionary press, as the victorious march of American civilization, culture, and literature as a part of that culture.

After the Civil War realistic tendencies gain an ever firmer hold on literature in the United States. The whole romantic epoch becomes a thing of the past in the history of American literature, having passed under the sign of the War of Independence and the social cataclysms of the nineteenth century. The comparatively late development of critical realism in the United States determined the specific features of this artistic method as well as the role which naturalism played under these circumstances, imparting a new quality to the literature of realism around the turn of the century and to a certain degree promoting the success of the new realist movement.

The realists were ceaselessly engaged in a polemic with romanticism, deriding its artistic devices and imagery. Recall Mark Twain's well-known essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences" (and the sequel, "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offences"), in which the creator of the celebrated Natty Bumppo is accused of transgressing against all the laws of literature. Mark Twain's essay was an expression of the whole anti-romantic program, the expression of a new, realistic conception of literature and creativity.

But even so great a realist as Mark Twain, while coming out against the literature of romanticism, paid tribute to the romantic tradition in one of his brightest artistic creations—the eternally young figure of Tom Sawyer; the author's idealization of the "good old days", set in opposition to contemporary bourgeois society, makes him akin to the romantics.

The Russian classical realism of Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov played a significant role in the development of realism in twentieth-century American literature. Whitman speaks with great pathos of the features uniting our nations; in an open letter designed to serve as the preface to the Russian translation of *Leaves of Grass*, he writes: "You Russians and we Americans: Our countries so distant, so unlike at first glance—such a difference in social and political conditions, and our respective methods of moral and practical development the last hundred years;—and yet in certain features, and vastest ones, so resembling each other. The variety of stockelements and tongues, to be resolutely fused in a common identity and union at all hazards—the idea, perennial through the ages, that they both have their historic and divine mission—the fervent element of manly friendship throughout the whole people, surpass'd by no other races—the grand expanse of territorial limits and boundaries—the unform'd and nebulous state of many things, not yet permanently settled, but agreed on all hands to be preparations of an infinitely greater future—the fact that both Peoples have their independent and leading positions to hold, keep, and if necessary, fight for, against the rest of the world—the deathless aspirations at the inmost centre of each great community, so vehement, so mysterious, so abysmic are certainly features you Russians and we Americans possess in common."⁹

Not only American writers, of course, but critics as well have long been discussing the problem of what it means to be a genuinely American writer. The works of Henry James, who was proclaimed a cosmopolitan writer, were often set in opposition to the works of William Dean Howells, who was seen as a truly American writer in his understanding of the American way of life. Howells was one of the first champions of realism in America; critics, though, usually bring up his name in connection with his statement calling on writers to depict the "smiling aspects" of life as something truly American. This careless remark by Howells led American critics to speak

of two traditions in literature: that cheerful, self-satisfied practicality supposedly proclaimed by Howells (which in fact does not encompass Howells' significance in the history of American literature), and "the other American tradition" (the title of an essay on the subject by University of California Professor Henry F. May), i.e., the critical tradition. Henry James, it goes without saying, was not the leading representative of this tradition.

The atmosphere of unclouded optimism which, according to certain literary critics in America, reigned during the "Howellsian epoch", was destroyed after 1917. Actually the fading of optimism was reflected in the works of Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Hamlin Garland, Jack London, Upton Sinclair and Theodore Dreiser already at the turn of the century. In the opinion of these American critics, the myth of America as a social and political utopia exploded in 1917.

The Great October Revolution opened up a new epoch of world history, a new page in world culture and literature.

The 1917 Revolution exerted a strong and productive influence on the development of American literature. It would be difficult to name one major author who witnessed these events and did not in some way respond to them. One must understand this influence in all its complexity, diversity and profundity. In 1938 Dreiser delivered a speech in Paris, in which he said that the socialist revolution altered the course of American literature, that it set in glaring relief the social inequality in America, arousing dissatisfaction and promoting the publication of books which supported the idea of reconstructing society. In *The Days of the Phoenix* (1957) Van Wyck Brooks described the climate of the initial post-war years among the literary intelligentsia and affirmed: "Every writer I came to know called himself a radical, committed to some program for changing and improving the world."¹⁰

October gave rise to an unprecedented torrent of documentary literature; there appeared a whole series of

eyewitness accounts of the stormy events taking place in distant Russia.

The best of these accounts is John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

John Reed was not alone. Albert Rhys Williams, the first in the West to draw a vivid portrait of Lenin (in *Lenin: the Man and His Work*, 1919), made a great contribution in his elaboration of the Russian theme. A second book by Williams, *Through the Russian Revolution* (1919), has every right to occupy a place next to Reed's *Ten Days*; where Reed portrays "a slice of intensified history", the culmination of revolutionary events in Petrograd, Williams depicts the nation-wide scale of the historical rift and the rising up of the only recently dormant peasant masses in the limitless expanses of Russia. There are other accounts that are equally outstanding and filled with sympathy toward the socialist revolution: Louise Bryant's series of sketches, *Six Red Months in Russia* (1918) and *Mirrors of Russia* (1923); Bessie Beatty's *The Red Heart of Russia* (1919), Ernest Poole's essays on the Russian peasantry; the memoirs of Colonel Raymond Robins; and many others. Lincoln Steffens, a veteran of the muckraker school, wrote an account which had wide repercussions; returning from Russia in the spring of 1919, he uttered the legendary phrase, "I saw the future, and it works."

In the following years American writers showed no less interest in the new world, the process of socialist construction, in the people who were creating new forms of socio-economic relations. In the first post-war decade Albert Rhys Williams continued to explore the theme of the Russian peasantry setting out on a new path (his book of essays, *The Russian Land*, 1928); A. L. Strong wrote of the great reforms taking place in Central Asia, that onetime backward hinterland of czarist Russia (*Red Star in Samarkand*, 1929; *The Road to the Grey Pamir*, 1931). Dreiser's express approval of the building of socialism (*Dreiser Looks at Russia*, 1927) had repercussions throughout America.

During the "red thirties" America manifested an ever greater interest in the Soviet Union, whose successes were set in sharp relief against the background of the severe economic crisis that struck the West. Many authors expressed their sympathy toward socialism and the new world order: Langston Hughes (*A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia*, 1934), Waldo Frank (*Dawn in Russia*, 1932), Edmund Wilson (*Travelling in Two Democracies*, 1935) and Genevieve Taggard (a cycle of poems about the USSR). The first belletristic work on the Soviet Union appeared at this time: Myra Page's *A Yankee in Moscow* (1935), about American specialists working at a Moscow factory. A. R. Williams' *The Soviets* (1937) came to serve as a unique encyclopedia of "the Soviet way of life".

Many leading exponents of American culture manifested an open sympathy toward our country in the years of World War Two and our common struggle against fascism. Among them were Theodore Dreiser and Carl Sandburg, Charlie Chaplin and Ernest Hemingway, Erskine Caldwell and Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman and Rockwell Kent. Equally renowned are the accounts of those American writers and journalists (E. Caldwell, Ella Winter, Jerome Davis, Richard Lauterbach and others) who were in the Soviet Union at the time and dispatched reports from the Soviet-German front. They saw the heroic feats of the Soviet Army and the people in the fight against fascism as an expression of the fundamental characteristics of the socialist system. As A. R. Williams wrote, the "secret weapon" of the Russians was the new man being shaped under new social and economic conditions.

The results of the war, as Richard Lauterbach testified in his book, *These Are the Russians* (1946), spoke for "the triumph of the socialist system".

But—and this is particularly important—the influence of the October Revolution made itself felt not only in the direct, immediate responses of writers to the events in Russia, and not only in books on the Russian theme. The shock of the First World War followed by the victory of

the Socialist Revolution in Russia made many writers feel the instability of the established order and permitted them to view with a critical eye certain values which had seemed stable and eternal. Many elements of American life came to be interpreted in light of another alternative, socialism, which had made its first concrete appearance.

Under these conditions American writers, though their literary aspirations might at times diverge, keenly felt the wrongs afflicting society and experienced the need to unite on the basis of some common ideological and aesthetic platform. The journal *Seven Arts* (1916-1917) became such a unifying center. Later a large group of literary men, authors of the collection *Civilization in the United States* (1922), edited by Harold Stearns, ascertained the alarming gap between successes in the field of material production and a lag in the spiritual and cultural field under the dominance of "the wallet"; the publicistic works of Upton Sinclair (the series, *The Dead Hand*) and Waldo Frank (*Our America* and *The Rediscovery of America*) carried out a "frontal attack" on the spiritual life of America.

The influence of the October Revolution was even more profoundly reflected in the fact that the decade following the First World War marked a qualitatively new stage in the development of critical realism in America. Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson and Upton Sinclair, John Dos Passos and Eugene O'Neill—"writers of the twenties", as they are often called—all of them very different artists, of course, each dealing in his own way with his own theme, his own sphere of life, expressed a general mood of rebellion, dissatisfaction and decisive rejection of "the dollar civilization".

This manifested itself in various ways. We see it in the depiction of the modern, conformist philistine immortalized in the person of Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt; we see it in the confused, muddled strivings of the residents of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, in the fierce rebelliousness of the worker Yank in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* and in the fiery protest against the callousness of the war ma-

chine in Dos Passos' early novels; we see it in the protest against the system of private enterprise which permeates all of Upton Sinclair's novels, from *Jimmie Higgins* and *King Coal* to *Boston*; and we see it in the feeling of profound enmity between the individual and society which Dreiser described in his formula: "an American tragedy".

The revolutionary impulses running through the literature of the thirties determined the qualitatively new features of critical realism of the time. Maxwell Geismar uses the term "social realism" to describe the writers of this decade. John Howard Lawson, a dramatist and theoretician of drama, writes, "Lenin's influence permeated the art and life of the thirties in subtle and half-acknowledged ways. Perhaps his greatest contribution was to give us back a sense of our history. . . . The preoccupation with history in the thirties is not solely a matter of formal scholarship. We find it in all the arts."¹¹ In further comments on "Lenin's influence" and "a sense of history", Lawson cites such writers as Steinbeck and Dos Passos (author of the trilogy, *U.S.A.*) as well as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner.

And he is quite right. A clearly expressed historicism is one of the characteristic features of the literature of the thirties.

It is significant that Faulkner began to work on his trilogy about the Snopes family toward the end of the twenties. Not only did he make the Communist Linda a unique counterbalance to the Snopes family, but also felt that their way of life was by its very nature doomed. Thomas Wolfe's sympathy toward socialism at the end of his life evidently led him to acknowledge the inner tragedy of American reality, an attitude particularly manifest in his novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*, especially in the striking finale. Caldwell, who had close ties with Left groups in the thirties, described the scandalous poverty that existed in the South and the rising protest of the poor.

Sinclair Lewis not only did pioneering work on the anti-fascist theme (*It Can't Happen Here*), but also work-

ed with great intensity on his novel about the workers' movement. Sherwood Anderson turned to the theme of industry and factory life, as reflected in his book *Beyond Desire*, a novel about a textile workers' strike. In his trilogy, *U.S.A.*, John Dos Passos creates an impressive panorama of American society in its historical development. In turning to the Faustian theme of the search for life's meaning, Waldo Frank creates a character typical for the bourgeois of that period, a man "divesting himself" of his class and searching for a way back to the people (*The Death and Birth of David Markand*). John Steinbeck writes his best book—his vivid, exciting tale about the Joads. Hemingway, who had long proclaimed his hostility toward politics and his distrust of all forms of "involvement", became a fierce anti-fascist during the course of events in Spain; moreover, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—written in Hemingway's inimitable manner—the author views the war and the revolution in Spain from a broad historical perspective, responding in his own way to the political and aesthetic questions of "the red decade".

The social novel of the thirties undoubtedly acquired new conceptual and artistic dimensions by comparison with the preceding decade. Malcolm Cowley in his article "Thirties Were the Years of Hope" was right in saying that "we" replaced "I" and "ours" replaced "my" in the vocabulary of this period.¹² The very concept of man as reflected in literature underwent a change, with writers turning away from Freud to Marx.

During the first post-war decade the attention of many writers attracted to psychoanalysis was focused on the internal world of the personality, which was often divested of broad social ties, whereas the "red thirties" graphically demonstrated the significance of social and economic factors, both in the life of society as a whole and in the life of the individual. Social determinism with respect to human behaviour and personality became an object of intense authorial interest, though this was accompanied by certain extremes and distortions as a result

of sketchiness and oversimplification; this does not give us the right to suppose, however, that the literature of this period was dominated by some sort of "economic man", one-sided and devoid of any psychological complexity. And although the writings of Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe and Fitzgerald during this period are marked by considerable achievements in the field of psychological analysis, the major tendency of this literary epoch was the desire of writers to place their heroes in the broad stream of historical events, to correlate their fate with that of society as a whole, to show them in their development, in the process of spiritual and moral growth. The spirit of collectivism and the idea of solidarity defined the new conception of the hero as a character endowed with positive principles; this was true not only of writers with an open revolutionary bent, but also of the masters of critical realism, in whose work the "rediscovery of America" was taking place during these years, to use Michael Gold's concise phrase.

Their heroes strike through to revolutionary truth like Steinbeck's Tom Joad; they search for a path to the working class like Waldo Frank's David Markand; they join ranks with those who actively oppose the existing system, like Dos Passos' Ben Compton and Faulkner's Linda; they go over to a position of active resistance to fascism, like Sinclair Lewis' Doremus Jessup and Upton Sinclair's Rudy Messer. The idea of collectivism which indeed became a "sign of the times" during these years was not simply a literary fad or an abstract slogan; it grew out of the practical requirements of the epoch. It embodied a new phase in that tradition of national literature which was heralded by Walt Whitman, who sang paeans to "The City of Friends"; by Bellamy, who preached the "religion of solidarity"; by William Dean Howells, who dreamed of the triumph of altruistic principles in the sphere of human relations. The typical heroes of the literature of the thirties include a working class leader, a communist, a bourgeois who has broken with his class, an apolitical member of the intelligentsia who

becomes an anti-fascist, a representative of "black America" defending his dignity.

The horizons of literature broaden in both a thematic and geographic sense. The theme of "the other Europe" joins that of "the other America". The problem of "their revolution" acquires exceptional poignancy. As a result writers start paying attention to "the Soviet factor" (Dreiser, A. R. Williams, Waldo Frank and others), to the struggle against fascism in Germany (Rice, Hellman) and to the war and revolution in Spain (Hemingway, Sinclair, Hughes and others).

Of course, not all the works dealing with the new themes were successful in an artistic sense. But by the same token one cannot accept the notion that the whole literary output of this decade is somehow devoid of artistic value or is purely utilitarian or propagandistic in nature. Many works of lasting aesthetic value were written in the course of this decade.

The basic forms of documentary literature began to take shape and crystallize; the literary sketch and reportage—genres which are mistakenly assigned to the periphery of the literary process—achieved a high level of sophistication. Documentary and publicistic elements "twined" themselves into the fabric of literary prose, and the fusion produced innovative patterns (Steinbeck and Dos Passos). The psychological novel, one of the most important achievement of American literature in the twenties, acquired greater social motivation. The best prose works of the "red thirties" include brilliant examples of the social novel with its surprising wealth of genres and stylistic forms (the political novel, the philosophical novel, the lyrical, historical, and documentary novel, etc.). Such masters as Ernest Hemingway, Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, and William Faulkner were attracted to life portraiture of epic proportions.

In all this—in the movement of social and political problems to the forefront of authorial attention, in the new conception of the hero and the masses, in the deepening sense of history, in the enrichment of genres and

structural forms—we see reflected a new vision of American reality in its social aspects. The greatest achievements of socialist realism in American literature fall precisely in this period of time.

In examining this problem, which is complex enough, we must take issue with the claims of certain American scholars—M. Himmelstein, for example—who believe that socialist realism is a “style” representing the conjunction of revolutionary ideology and traditional melodramatic form (as applicable to drama), that it was “invented in Moscow” and virtually “thrust” on American critics, who started to “practise” it on American soil.

Although the term “socialist realism” appeared at the beginning of the thirties, the method it represented took shape considerably earlier, both in Soviet and non-Soviet literature. Its formation was part of the objective, natural revolutionary process on a world-wide scale, the result of the artist’s quest for means of expression suited to new forms of life.

In America the distinctive quality of the development and genesis of socialist realism was determined by concrete, national, historically stipulated features in the development of the country. And here, in our opinion, two factors play a decisive role.

On the one hand, the historical process in America has been marked by extremely sharp contrasts and contradictions; hence the exceptional pungency of social criticism in the works of many American writers and the appearance of such specifically national forms as “the literature of protest” or “the novel of protest”. Despite their “protest”, however, many writers retain a belief in the power and possibility of reform as well as democratic procedure as a way of overcoming social contradictions. On the other hand, even Marx and Engels noted the specifically Anglo-American trait of “dislike for theory”. Lenin called Upton Sinclair a “socialist of the emotions without any theoretical training”. Certain other American writers could also be called “socialists of the emotions”, among them Jack London, Carl Sandburg and Randolph Bourne.

In America prevailing ideas are likely to exert particular pressure on writers. And this, in our view, explains that surprising unevenness which marks the artistic development of many American writers—Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Waldo Frank, Sherwood Anderson, Clifford Odets, Richard Wright, John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos. One moment they affiliate themselves with the socialist and workers' movement, proclaim their leftist views and compose works filled with social critical content; and then suddenly they begin to worship what they had previously condemned and pay tribute to conformist tendencies. But one thing is indisputable: the period when they tackled the problems of "the other America" proved for each writer to be the most striking, most fruitful, and the most significant in an artistic sense.

The problem of the new method in Western countries, and especially in America, should be resolved in full view of the complexities inherent to it; one should avoid the tendency to narrow down or impoverish material without justification. In American literature there were not all that many artists who steadfastly and consistently adhered to socialist ideology. Besides the works of those writers who could be called socialist realists *one must take into account the substantial transitional phenomena and forms, the individual works and tendencies which reflect a general movement toward the new method.*

The appearance of the new method was necessarily preceded by the development in American literature of the theme of conflict between labor and capital and the first attempts to portray the American proletariat. The theme of class conflict entered into American literature already in the seventies and eighties of the past century, especially in connection with the Haymarket affair, W. D. Howells' novels, for example. The beginning of the twentieth century is in principle significant for the genesis of socialist realism, for it was marked by the flowering of literature connected with the workers' and socialist movement. It produced prosaists (London, Sinclair, Poole), critics (R. Bourne), and poets (Joe Hill), whose best works

prove in many respects to be forerunners of the new method. Mass proletarian poetry also had its own role to play here, partly in connection with the IWW movement. During these years a new, proletarian hero emerged in literature, though his depiction was at times sketchy and one-sided (Jack London's Everhard, for example). The life and labor of the working masses was now far more concretely displayed (Upton Sinclair). The author of *The Jungle* and *King Coal* prepared the way for the "proletarian novel" of the thirties.

The originator of socialist realism in America was John Reed, a writer of the new type uniting "thought and action". In his outstanding work *Ten Days That Shook the World*, the October Revolution is artistically interpreted as a new page in world history. The book is completely original and innovative in form; vivid pictures, scenes and episodes are daringly fused with publicistic digressions and documentary elements which are interspersed throughout the text. This principle of "fusion" later came into widespread use in American literature. And not only in American. In his preface to the book V. I. Lenin wrote, "With the greatest interest and with never slackening attention I read John Reed's book, *Ten Days That Shook the World*. Unreservedly do I recommend it to the workers of the world. Here is a book which I should like to see published in millions of copies and translated into all languages. It gives a truthful and most vivid exposition of the events so significant to the comprehension of what really is the Proletarian Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. These problems are widely discussed, but before one can accept or reject these ideas, he must understand the full significance of his decision. John Reed's book will undoubtedly help to clear this question, which is the fundamental problem of the international labor movement."¹³ And in fact, Reed's book did have world-wide impact; it has been published and republished in every corner of the globe, and serves as an example of the inexhaustible vitality of revolutionary art.

In the thirties socialist realism was already a definite trend in American literature. It was represented in the works of a whole group of writers standing on a new conceptual and aesthetic platform (Steffens, Maltz, Gold, Lawson, Mike Quin, etc.). In our estimation the critic Gaylord Le Roy is right in saying that the proletarian literature of the thirties is of greater artistic significance than acknowledged by the critics of the fifties and sixties, and insofar as the battle for socialism is still continuing, there exists a foundation for the literature of socialist realism.

Steffens, composer of an outstanding *Autobiography*, written against a broad social historical background; Dreiser, author of *Tragic America* and his crowning works, the novels *The Stoic* and *The Bulwark* helped to give shape to the new method during the thirties. Offshoots of the method produced by the growth of the workers' theme in the American theatre appeared in the drama of Maltz, Peters, Lawson and Gold. Qualitatively new features were manifested in the poetry of Langston Hughes and Edwin Rolfe.

The process of formation of the new method can be traced most clearly by examining the most important and successful proletarian novels of the thirties. Undergoing complex development, overcoming the difficulties of growth, the problems of sketchiness and narrow thematic range, it found its most felicitous expression in the works of Gold and Maltz, as well as Dalton Trumbo, Conroy and Cantwell. It was distinguished by a profound historicism and a tragic element tinged with optimism (in *The Land of Plenty* by Cantwell and *Underground Stream* by Maltz) where the temporary setback affecting a strike, or the death of a hero, is perceived in the light of inexorable historical processes. In the literature of the turn of the century workers were still portrayed as "men of the abyss", as poor people who evoked feelings of sympathy; in the thirties the figure of the proud proletarian appears, a man fully aware of his own dignity.

And in the post-war years, despite all the difficulties

of literary development, socialist realism continued to develop, as evidenced by Lars Lawrence' cycle of novels *The Seed*, the poetry of Walter Lowenfels, who in his last years experienced a veritable second youth, W. E. Du Bois' trilogy *The Black Flame*, and by other works.

In studying the spiritual and artistic wealth of nations, we proceed from Marx's teaching on two cultures. We consider of utmost importance the proposition advanced by V. I. Lenin, namely, that in every national culture there are, if only in rudimentary form, the elements of democratic and socialist culture, "since in *every* nation there are toiling and exploited masses, whose conditions of life inevitably give rise to the ideology of democracy and socialism".¹⁴ This thesis is extremely important if one is to understand the ways in which American culture and literature have developed.

In his "Letter to American Workers" (1918) Lenin wrote: "The American people have a revolutionary tradition which has been adopted by the best representatives of the American proletariat, who have repeatedly expressed their complete solidarity with us Bolsheviks. That tradition is the war of liberation against the British in the eighteenth century and the Civil War in the nineteenth century."¹⁵

The American Revolution and its great documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights—exercised tremendous influence, especially on democratic American literature. Its development was inspired by the high democratic ideal embodied by Jefferson and Lincoln, by the idea of freedom, independence, equal opportunity for all, and the unlimited development of each individual's talents and potentials. This democratic ideal was embodied with particular forcefulness in the literature of the abolitionist period, and above all in the works of Walt Whitman.

It is no accident that at every stage of American history a certain tradition has manifested itself, one which is called the "literature of protest". Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Edward Bellamy, author of

Looking Backward, the “muckrakers” and Upton Sinclair, author of *The Jungle*, Sinclair Lewis, author of *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, John Steinbeck, author of *Grapes of Wrath*, and many other authors repeatedly raised their voices against all forms of injustice, defending man and his freedom.

The democratic tradition undoubtedly determines the fundamental national traits of American literature.

And at the same time the very historical process with the contradictions and profound contrasts that inevitably reveal themselves forced the most perspicacious writers to go beyond the limits of bourgeois democratic ideals and to search for answers to social problems in socialist transformation.

The October Revolution provided a new, powerful stimulus for the development of a socialist tradition in American literature which, as we have already stated, had deep national roots. This tradition declared itself with particular forcefulness during the “red thirties”. The democratic and socialist traditions do not conflict; the second is the further development of the first.

The rise of the anti-war, black and democratic movements in the United States during the late sixties and early seventies and the growing interest in Marxism on the part of a large segment of American society, particularly the country’s youth, including both students and workers, give one reason to hope that the literary traditions inspired by socialist ideas—which have such deep historical roots in the United States—will receive new live-giving impulses.

NOTES

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Collection Complète des œuvres de J.-J. Rousseau, Citoyen de Genève*, t. 7, p. 28.

² *The World Almanac*, Declaration of Independence, 1949, pp. 153-54.

³ Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America*, N.Y., 1970, p. 21.

⁴ Ezra Pound, *Impact. Essays on Ignorance and the Decline of American Civilization*, Chicago, Regnery Co., 1960, p. 3.

- ⁵ *The Golden Age of American Literature*, ed. by Perry Miller, N.Y., 1959, pp. 1-2.
- ⁶ *Literary History of the United States*, N.Y., 1957, p. 1391.
- ⁷ Marcus Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States*, 1954, p. 10.
- ⁸ James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat*, N.Y., 1956, Introduction, p. XIV.
- ⁹ Walt Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*, Berlin, 1958, pp. 542-43.
- ¹⁰ Van Wyck Brooks, *The Days of the Phoenix*, N.Y., 1957, p. 17.
- ¹¹ *Lenin's Impact on the United States*, ed. by D. Mason and J. Smith, A New World Review Collection, N.Y., 1970, pp. 216-17.
- ¹² *New York Times Book Review*, December 13, 1964, p. 5.
- ¹³ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 519.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 20, p. 24.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 69.

M. KORENEVA

THE CONTEMPORARY WAR NOVEL*

Since 1865, when the Civil War came to an end, not a single shell has exploded on American soil; not one bomb dropped from a hostile plane has destroyed a single home; America has not groaned under the heel of one foreign soldier's boot. Even the tempest of the two world wars which ravaged Europe did not touch her territory. There were no ruined cities, no blood-soaked fields, no Auschwitz or Dachau; no countless war dead, no casualties among old people, women, and children. One could go on listing the terrible calamities that America has been spared (though here, too, the wars took its toll) because the country experienced neither an enemy invasion nor even the proximity of an enemy force. That is why the consistent and ever-growing interest of American writers in war themes and the depiction of man at war seems inexplicable at first glance.

Critics have long noted the fact that in order to write about twentieth century America, many authors found it necessary to look at it from a distance, and extract the essence of the country's historical experience from the

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boundless sea of reality. A similar phenomenon may be observed in the war novel. War provides the American writer with a kind of ready-made, "extracted" experience, allowing him to disclose the most important realities of American society. Thus, after World War I, the war novels of Dos Passos and Hemingway contained the tale of a whole generation that was fated to comprehend the anti-humanist essence of bourgeois society, ultimately expressed in the imperialistic war, in the cruellest possible way—on the battlefield. The same was true for the mid-twentieth century when mankind was faced with the spectre of nuclear war threatening total annihilation. The necessity of forestalling such a catastrophe made it imperative to comprehend thoroughly the tragic lessons of history.

The number of American works dealing with the war theme grows with each passing year. Quantity, it goes without saying, is not the major factor here. It is, rather, that some of the outstanding examples of post-war American prose deal with war. Such writers as Norman Mailer, James Jones, Irwin Shaw, Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut used war as a means to find and expose the tangle of contradictions that reflect the most essential aspects of contemporary American reality.

This is not to imply that treating the theme of war is sufficient to guarantee the significance of a work. The majority of war novels are neither profound nor accurate in their evaluation of war; on the contrary, some of them present a distorted image of war and men at war. They follow the traditions of jingoism and depict gallant soldiers who know no fear as they perform astounding feats of heroism. In such sugary accounts, the great battle of nations, the incredible suffering and deaths of tens of millions of men, the heroic struggle to break free of the fascist plague with its crimes unprecedented in scale and monstrousness, are made to look like a pleasant little outing which acquires higher meaning and interest only because it is connected with a certain risk. In the final analysis, all such inferior works, devoid of any evident

ideology but claiming to give an authentic, documentary picture of war, are often apologies for violence.

Alongside the above-mentioned works, however, we find works of another sort. They are rarer, but there are enough of them to constitute a whole movement. Their authors take a serious and profound interest in the fate of mankind, the essence of human nature and of society; they strive to understand the underlying causes of war. To achieve this, they are compelled to speak the cruel, ugly truth about war.

In the preface to the edition of his World War II reportage, published in 1958 under the title *Once There Was a War*, John Steinbeck writes that war correspondents did not and could not tell the whole truth about the war. "There was no cowards in the American Army," notes Steinbeck, not without irony, "and of all the brave men the private in the infantry was the bravest and noblest . . . we had no cruel or ambitious or ignorant commanders. . . . We were all a part of the War Effort. We went along with it, and not only that, we abetted it. Gradually it became a part of all of us that the truth about anything was automatically secret. . . ." Further developing this idea, Steinbeck continues: "By this I don't mean that the correspondents were liars. They were not. . . . It is in the things not mentioned that the untruth lies."¹

Such lacunae were permitted in wartime, but Norman Mailer, James Jones, John Hersey, Kurt Vonnegut and Irwin Shaw—to mention only the most prominent writers—felt that they had to speak the whole truth about the war. Naturally they do not so much quarrel with the war correspondents as polemicize with those who glorify war. Continuing the tradition of Dos Passos and Hemingway, they depict war as pitiless carnage which brings incalculable physical and moral suffering to mankind and transforms a man into a fanatic, a sadist, a beast. To show the great evil of war they strive to stun the reader with pictures of its horrors. At the same time they affirm—though not always consistently or clearly—that World

War II was necessary in order to strike down an evil greater than war itself: fascism.

But while recognizing the justice and necessity of the war against fascism, the most thoughtful and serious American novelists felt obliged simultaneously to show the paradox inherent in the fact that the struggle against fascism was led by men who, to a certain extent, shared the reactionary ideology of the enemy.

The American scholar Joseph J. Waldmeir is profoundly mistaken when, in comparing the novels of the First and Second World Wars, he affirms that the latter "were all, implicitly or explicitly, pro-war novels; that is, their authors clearly were committed to the war, sufficiently at least that *in no novel was it condemned as useless or senseless* as the first World War had frequently been condemned by its chroniclers"² (Italics mine—M.K.).

The novels of James Gould Cozzens, Herman Wouk, R. Powell and other similarly minded writers were unreservedly "pro-war". Turning to the Second World War for material, they were least of all concerned with exposing the ideological basis of the greatest and bloodiest of wars, its goals and its nature. They had no doubt that the war was necessary, but for entirely different reasons: they seemed most intent on affirming and glorifying militaristic ideas. Everyone knows that such novels as *The Soldier* by R. Powell or *The Caine Mutiny* by Wouk brought no real glory either to their creators, or to American literature.

With regard to the best realistic war novels—Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*, John Hersey's *The War Lover*, Mitchell Goodman's *The End of It*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five or the Children's Crusade* and certain others—Waldmeir's observations are applicable only in the narrowest sense of the word. The authors of these novels concede the necessity of the war as a means of ending fascism. At the same time they condemn war in general as unjustified mass murder, as the source of incalculable human suffering and privation; in this sense their works

are not *pro*- but *anti*-war, continuing the tradition of the twenties.

Their picture of the war, complicated enough as it is, is supplemented by the depiction of the growth of open reactionary tendencies in certain circles of the American army. It must be said to the credit of Mailer, I. Shaw, Hersey, Vonnegut and Heller, that they manage, with more or less continuity and depth, to condemn such dangerous tendencies which threatened to spread from the army into American society as a whole. In this respect as well these are anti-war novels.

A writer's powers of penetration sometimes permit him to discern the perilous offshoots of reactionary ideology, and not merely the contrivances of cynical priests of the God of war, when American generals speak in lofty, demagogic phrases about the superiority of American democracy, the need to forget all differences and join to create a powerful striking force. In the final analysis, such insights determine the success of a work and the significance of its contribution to literature.

The most important artistic revelation of the American war novel, and its definitive feature, is its recognition of the contradictions inherent in America's position in the war. This recognition is expressed with varying degrees of clarity and understanding of the social and political roots of this dramatic internal conflict. As the development of the post-war novel in the United States demonstrates, however, no novel claiming to create an accurate picture of reality can fail to recognize these contradictions.

This realization of America's contradictory role in the Second World War is fixed in the artistic construction of the American war novel: we find it in the striking presence of negative characters, common to almost every work, who personify the reactionary forces within the American army—"the second face of villainy"³ as Joseph J. Waldmeir puts it; and we find it in the war novel's particular structure, which is based on the contradiction between internal and external events, whose juxtaposition serves as the major source of conflict.

The external action proceeds toward a victorious finale, in correspondence with the objective course of the historical process. Regardless of whether the author concentrates on the wide theatre of war where hundreds of thousands take part, or focuses on comparatively inconspicuous military operations—one is always aware of the imminent defeat of fascism. This is rarely stated outright, but it can be more or less deduced from the work's context. Insofar as the works under discussion were written after the war, the author often considered it superfluous to dwell on the outcome at any great length. This way the more or less clear implication of the imminent rout of Hitlerism above all expresses the author's conviction that the Second World War was just and therefore necessary.

The internal action, as opposed to the external action, is accompanied by the accumulation of negative rather than positive emotions and impressions. Simultaneously the conflict shifts more and more clearly from the province of external action to that of internal action. This is reflected in the alignment of characters. The enemy becomes ideological rather than military and often enough the enemy turns out to be in one's own ranks; for it is in the internal action that the writer expresses his condemnation of war as the source of cruel and senseless suffering. The external action is most often conveyed in the terrible battle scenes, the description of murders and inhuman torments of the wounded, and in various subplots; the internal action is conveyed primarily in the delineation of characters.

In their unity these components, reflecting the actual contradictions of history, gave birth to the American realistic war novel, and only the totality of these features can define its particular and exclusive qualities. Calling on writers to chronicle the Second World War, history demands that they resolve a threefold task: 1) to establish the image of this war as a just war, to the extent that it involved the fight of all peoples against German fascism; 2) to totally expose the dangers of fascism and its ideology, as well as the militaristic philosophy of impe-

rialism, whatever form it may take; 3) finally, in the interests of the welfare and redemption of humanity, to instill in men a hatred of war. The American novelists do not always manage to retain a proper perspective and accordingly their works may lean, from time to time, to one or the other side. But despite philosophical and artistic shortcomings, every honorable attempt to grasp so extraordinarily complex and historical phenomenon as the Second World War was for the United States, deserves serious attention and study.

These general considerations have been confirmed by an analysis of many works of American literature written in the last three decades. The uniqueness of the American war novel is reflected most clearly and consummately in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) which, if not the best work of this genre, without doubt ranks among the highest achievements of post-war American prose (Mailer himself considers the best war novel to be James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*, 1951).

The external action of Mailer's novel is focused on a military operation which takes place on a small island in the Pacific. It opens with the landing of American troops, under the command of General Cummings, on the island of Anopopei, and concludes with the total defeat of the Japanese detachments. Any reader sufficiently informed of the course and outcome of the war would have no difficulty perceiving this as one episode, albeit a very minor one, in the common struggle against fascism. But the victory is depicted as purely military. Positive notes are muffled and this in itself prepares us for the evaluation of events that constitute the internal action, based on the conflict between Cummings and Lieutenant Robert Hearn, and on the counterplot connected with Sergeant Croft's reconnaissance mission behind enemy lines.

The external action in other novels is structured in much the same fashion, though the accent may be different. Much depends on the setting. Thus, in those novels dealing with the European front, the image of the war as a war of liberation conducted by peoples striving to

cast off the yoke of fascism is presented with much greater clarity and allows the author to reveal more precisely the positive aspects of the struggle (as in Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* or even John Hersey's *The War Lover*). Here we are speaking not so much of the character's realization of their mission, but rather of the construction of the action itself. In Mitchell Goodman's *The End of It* (1961), a less significant work, we follow the movements of the American army in Italy, where the success of the military operations entails the actual overthrow of fascism and the liberation of the Italian people. The same cannot be said for *The Naked and the Dead*, where the external action is portrayed as a purely military clash in which liberation and the liberated are not present at all.

But even in the "European" war novels, the basis of the conflict remains the opposition of internal and external action. In *The War Lover*, it is the contrast between the approach of victory and the growing sense of doom that marks Boman's and Marrow's last flight. In Goodman's novel the action reaches its apogee at the moment when the "liberators" deliberately shoot the unarmed Italian prisoners who had been driven by the Germans to labor camps in Germany. The contrast between internal and external action is perhaps most pronounced in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, whose hero, Billy Pilgrim, is captured on the eve of the war's end and brought to Dresden, which was levelled by American bombers. The number of victims from this operation which was directed against the civilian population exceeded the number of victims in Hiroshima.

A noteworthy feature of James Jones' *From Here to Eternity* which distinguishes it from the majority of war novels is the fact that its positive underlying principle is embodied in America's entry into the war rather than the successful completion of some military operation. The trying waiting period ends and things start moving when America's promises, made to a Europe exhausted by the struggle with fascism, are finally backed up with action. Written some years earlier, *The Naked and the Dead* shows where these promises led. Jones also introduces

elements of irony into the ending of his novel, which closes with a conversation between a seven-year-old boy and his mother. The boy is worried that there won't be any more wars left when he grows up. His mother comforts him with the assurance that he has nothing to fear on that account.

The basic conflict in *The Naked and the Dead* is ideological and, as has already been noted, it does not coincide with the framework of the military conflict, the external action. Already at the start of the novel Hearn remarks that the general, considered by many to be the most amiable member of division headquarters, is "a tyrant, a tyrant with a velvet voice, it is true, but undeniably a tyrant".⁴ This is confirmed by his savage and derisive attitude toward his subordinates, particularly toward Hearn. But Mailer does not leave this conflict on a level where it might be attributed to the general's personal sadistic tendencies. He transfers it to an ideological plane, outlining a profascist philosophy behind the general's actions. Mailer endows Cummings with a tenacious and sober analytic mind, capable of objectively evaluating facts, although his interpretations of these facts are far from the truth: "We have the highest standard of living in the world and, as one would expect, the worst individual fighting soldiers of any big power. Or at least in their natural state they are. They're comparatively wealthy, they're spoiled, and as Americans they share most of them the peculiar manifestation of our democracy."⁵

One of the most important features attributed by many war novelists to Americans who have accepted the fascist ideology is their openly hostile attitude toward democracy, their conviction that democracy, rather than fascism, is the root of all evil. The most biting and detailed portrayals of such characters, apart from Mailer's, can be found in James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*.

In the iron logic of Cummings we can see all the vices of rationalism, devoid of any moral foundation. He acts as an apologist for the cult of strength and power, declaring that war and politics are beyond human morality:

"Robert, politics have no more relation to history than moral codes have to the needs of any particular man."⁶ In Cummings' interpretation of the war there is not the slightest hint of an acknowledgement of the noble goals implicit in the overthrow of fascism. He sees no need to do this, even for the sake of camouflage. "You're misreading history if you see this war as a grand revolution," he tells Hearn. "It's power concentration."⁷ "...The only morality of the future is a power morality,"⁸ he exclaims at one point later on.

The trouble with fascism for him is not its bestial philosophy of violence and destruction maintained only by force of arms, but the fact that it "started in the wrong country, in a country which did not have enough intrinsic potential power to develop completely".⁹ In his opinion, the country where fascism can and should triumph is the United States. In this vein he regards his own actions and, no doubt, the actions of the American army as the clearing of land for the cultivation of a new fascist empire.

The principle of "trampling down the weak" which Cummings espouses with regard to international relations, is seen by him as the basis of an army structure ideally suited to his purposes. He sees no need for high ideals in a soldier, nor does he want men conscious of their civic duty. What he needs are persons who obey without thinking, and the fear which allows men like Cummings to manipulate their subordinates as they please. To smash and trample a man is for Cummings synonymous to the creation of an ideal soldier-assassin, one who will unquestioningly execute the orders of his superiors. The cornerstone of his methods is the instillment of fear: "...Break them down. Every time an enlisted man sees an officer get an extra privilege, it breaks him down a little more. ... Every time there's what you call an Army injustice, the enlisted man involved is confirmed a little more in the idea of his own inferiority. ... To make an Army work you have to have every man in it fitted into a fear ladder.... The Army functions best when you're frightened

of the man above you, and contemptuous of your subordinates.”¹⁰

Hearn reminds him of that sort of hatred which may in the end compel soldiers “to turn their machine-guns around”. But even this hatred does not alarm Cummings, who is convinced of his own power; Hearn’s warning is parried by the general’s theory that such hatred is useful: “The time soldiers start doing that is when an Army is about defeated. Until then, the hate just banks in them, makes them fight a little better. They can’t turn it on us, so they turn it outward.”¹¹ Cummings confirms his theory in a rather curious way, through personal example. After pitilessly settling accounts with his subordinates and, in particular, after sending the unyielding Hearn to certain death in a reconnaissance detachment, the omnipotent, invincible Cummings trembles at the thought that his decisions may displease his superiors who have the power of relieving him of his command and depriving him of his next star.

If, in the character of Cummings, sadism assumes the guise of intellectualism, in Sergeant Croft it takes on the form of a purely physical threat to human existence. There would seem to be little in common between the polished general, who constructs a complex chain of deductions on the essence of humanity’s present state of development and the role designated to the doctrine of power, and the dull Croft, who can hardly put two words together without inserting an expletive, who violently hates any sort of “learning” and believes that problems can be solved only through the use of fists. In fact they adhere to the same doctrine and are no more than opposite sides of the same coin. Croft cannot theoretically grasp the barbarous laws by which he lives, but like the general he rigorously affirms the cult of violence in his daily behavior. He hates the men in his detachment, he hates his superiors for their position of superiority, and those who are weaker than himself for that weakness; he hates blacks: “Ah jus’ looked at that nigger after that, an’ Ah said, Boy, you no-good black bastard, an’ Ah jus’

picked up that hatchet an' let him have it right across the head."¹² This is the voice of his family, whose lessons Croft has absorbed and enlarged upon. In fact Croft hates everything living on the earth ("I hate Everything Which is Not in Myself,"¹³ he says, and this is his own voice, in the "Time Machine"). Eaten away by this violent hatred, Croft finds satisfaction only in the suffering he inflicts on others and in the sight of blood. Mailer makes Croft the personification of a bestial, and maniacal passion for killing. One of the most impressive episodes illustrating the essence of Croft's character is the scene where a Japanese prisoner is executed. Croft treats him with the finesse of a seasoned sadist. First he convinces the Japanese that his life will be spared; when the prisoner demonstrates his gratitude and good will by showing Croft a photograph of his wife and children, the latter shoots him point-blank, to the amazement of even his buddy Gallagher—a man not easily moved to pity, having himself participated in pogroms against Jews at home. The voluptuous pleasure experienced by Croft each time he pulls the trigger is akin to the pleasure the general feels when he torments his adversary Hearn by fully exercising his superior rank. On learning of Hearn's death, Cummings "would feel a mingled pain and satisfaction".¹⁴

In the images of Croft and Cummings, Mailer discerns the roots of fascist ideology, although he excessively emphasizes biological motives. His "strong" characters suffer from sexual neuroses which they strive to compensate for by "concentrating their power" in other areas. Although for Mailer this disorder is also the result of a civilization which is spiritually imperialistic and therefore hostile to man, his analogy is too one-sided. Another, healthy America is, in essence, beyond his field of vision.

In almost all serious war novels we find analogous figures through whom, with varying degrees of specificity, we can examine the reactionary tendencies which were gaining ascendancy in the American army. These may be minor characters, like the general who addresses the soldiers in M. Goodman's *The End of It*—a ridic-

ulous figure, posing as a straightforward fellow with his heart on his sleeve. His speech, however, contains not one word of truth; it is sprinkled with expletives and obscene "soldier's" jokes in order to gain the trust of his audience, but throughout the vulgar clownish chatter rings a chauvinistic and offensive note: "Americans love to fight, traditionally. Any American worth a good god-damn that is. All real Americans love the sting and clash of battle. America loves a fighter, just like America loves a winner. We're Americans, we're here to keep America on the map. OK. America will not tolerate a loser. Hell no! Why should she, she's the greatest nation on the face of the earth. Americans despise a fucking coward. Americans play to win. That's why America has never lost a war and will never lose a war."¹⁵ Reading these lines, one recalls the instinctive distaste felt by Hemingway's heroes for the lofty rhetoric wielded by politicians who, for their own selfish purposes, use them to throw men into the imperialistic slaughterhouse.

At times such a character will play a central role in a novel, as does Buzz Marrow in Hersey's *The War Lover* (1959), a man possessed by a passion for destruction. Like Cummings and Croft, Marrow goes into ecstasies when his plane shakes as rounds of bullets are fired from it. He openly confesses that during the bombing, "...he, Marrow, had had the best feeling he'd ever had in his life outside of intercourse".¹⁶ (Once again the theme of sex appears. The biological interpretation of Marrow's motives is based on his unhappy childhood where the hostility of those around him drove him to seek compensation by asserting his own superiority. Such an approach betrays the limited horizons of the author.) In the end the second pilot Boman recognizes the terrible essence of his friend Marrow's "heroism" and comes to the tragic conclusion that: "War equaled s—, and peace equaled s—. There would never be peace so long as there were men with Marrow's taint."¹⁷ Despite his great aversion to Marrow, Boman can only counter Marrow's "taint" with the prospect of "a separate peace" and a determination to survive. His

enmity toward Buzz is purely emotional. Only towards the end of the novel does he begin to perceive the true reasons for his hatred of a man whom he once admired. But he cannot abstract Buzz's negative qualities and formulate a general principle on this basis. He cannot fathom what forces gave birth to Marrow, nor what forces can be brought to bear against him.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut writes: "One of the main effects of war, after all, is that people are discouraged from being characters."¹⁸ These words might serve as an epigraph to many American war novels. They may be interpreted in various ways, but certainly they imply a protest against the senseless cruelty of war as expressed in the monstrous degeneration of heroism in such men as Croft, Marrow, Cummings and Slater. Such ideals as "courage", "selflessness", and "military valor" are purely negative traits in these men. Strength becomes violence, courage—cruelty. The projection of such traits, which are characteristic of the cruel military machine, onto human nature itself—as though heroism were alien to man—and the inability to distinguish between false and genuine heroism, to comprehend and depict heroic feats, must be considered a major weakness of the contemporary American war novel.

The most convincing debunker of fascist ideology—even taking into account General Slater in *From Here to Eternity*, a man who shares Cummings' profession of the cult of power—is Norman Mailer. Noting the dangerous social tendencies exhibited by Cummings and Croft, Mailer warns that in time these may develop and lead to the establishment of a totalitarian regime. Mailer's pitiless denunciation of attempts to cultivate a new breed of fascists on American soil, demonstrated his proximity to progressive movements and leftist forces; later he gave up many of his progressive ideas.

In the American war novel attempts to repulse fascism are not limited to a critique of the dangerous tendencies ripening in the American army. Although positive characters, both in richness of ideological content and artistic

expressiveness, lose out to negative ones, any attempt on the part of American writers to find and affirm values worthy of preservation deserves sympathetic attention and scholarly research. Mailer, for example, does not simply depict people who suffer at the hands of Cummings and Croft; in other words he does not limit himself to the emotional-moral sphere. Rather, he transfers the conflict to the moral-intellectual sphere, emphasizing the ideological differences of adversaries. Lieutenant Hearn, Cummings' foil, is the scion of a wealthy family who became attracted to Marxism, broke with his family and actively participated in the labor movement. But in the end he loses the duel. There are of course a number of subjective causes which receive considerable attention: an insufficiently deep grasp of Marxism ("I've played around with it,"¹⁹ confesses Hearn), the absence of firm conviction in the righteousness of his ideals, a psychological imbalance, a hot temper. On the whole, however, there are *objective* causes stemming from the character of the war as waged by the Americans. Hearn himself is perfectly aware of this. When Cummings asks why the war is being waged, Robert answers: "I don't know, I'm not sure. With all the contradictions, I suppose there's an objective right on our side. That is, *in Europe*. Over here, as far as I'm concerned, it's an *imperialist* tossup.... We might easily go Fascist after we win, and then the answer's really a problem"²⁰ (Italics mine—M.K.).

To counter Cummings actively and effectively, Hearn must define for himself his own role in the war, but this proves impossible. There is no exit from his situation through "a separate peace". Hearn is sufficiently aware of his position to understand that this would inevitably be taken as a refusal to join in the routing of fascism. History confirmed this; the leftists' capacity for opposition was weakened by the doubt and disillusionment felt when the forces of reaction assumed the offensive; the contradictoriness of the United States' position during the war led in the immediate post-war period to a policy which for many years appeared to reflect Cummings' own ideas.

At the time when Mailer was writing *The Naked and the Dead*, he was probably not cognizant of this, but the very fact that he was able to sense the direction of American social development in the post-war period speaks for his vision as a writer.

The hero of the war novel, like Hearn, has nowhere to go. War on two fronts has drained his strength and can lead only to the hero's death (Prewitt, in *From Here to Eternity*) or to a state approximating death (Billy Pilgrim, Boman). For a time, it is true, Boman indulges himself with the idea of "a separate peace". Had he achieved this, he would no longer be a character embodying positive values. But in the end, he begins to comprehend the narrowness of this position.

The aforementioned characters are war victims, a fact which is essential in determining the writer's views. By depicting them in this way, Mailer, Vonnegut, Jones, and Hersey stress the senselessness of war and its inhuman nature. This is most obvious in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Everything about Billy Pilgrim, including his attire—the too short jacket splitting at the seams, and later the absurd azure cloak and silver boots—forces the reader to conclude that before him is a lost child, tossed into the whirlwind of events which he cannot understand and therefore cannot control. He is, in the full sense of the word, a prisoner of circumstances which find their ultimate expression in the bombardment of Dresden, where the crushing might of the air force—"his" air force—descends on thousands of people who are as defenseless as he. In this way, Billy becomes the personification of suffering humanity in the war.

A rather recent creation, this character is rooted not only in the terrible experiences and disillusionment of the war years but in the post-war bitterness of many Western writers who, in pondering the fate of humanity, came to acknowledge man's impotence in the face of the cruelty of his environment. Billy's ability to foresee the future is full of significance here. But knowledge, like ignorance, leaves him a prisoner, deprives him of his will

and subjects him to the free flow of things. In Vonnegut's world there can be no transition from suffering to action, from victim to fighter.

The hero of *The End of It*, Lieutenant Freeman, actually passes through death. Shaken by the sight of a mass execution of Italian prisoners by American artillery (the retreating Germans had forced them to work in the North), he sinks into a long period of unconsciousness: when he comes to, he is convinced that he is indispensable to the unfortunate people of Italy. But first he must break with America. Here we see both the reflection of objective aspects of reality, and the weak ideological position of these writers. The weakness of the protagonist is at the same time the result of the debilitating influence of the war, and this is precisely the way that most realistic writers portray the positive hero. Reviewing Hemingway's novels *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises*, the Soviet writer Andrei Platonov noted that all genuinely human qualities shrivelled "under the fatal influence of imperialism"; in these novels, Platonov says, a man manages to defend only the simplest, almost animalistic rights. When we compare Hemingway's novels with contemporary works, it becomes evident that in contrast to the world of Hemingway's heroes, a world which, however limited, still embodies sought-after human values, the world of the hero of the Second World War has shrunk catastrophically. Almost none of the latter-day heroes manage, if only for a moment, to tear free of the power of "death and despair in war" as did Lieutenant Henry; not one is able to rise to the heights of a free, selfless emotion. This has a peculiar impact on the style of these novels as well. The speech is simplistic and often confined to a narrow part of the lexicon, built—especially in characterizations of soldiers—on incessantly repeated expletives which testify to the total loss of individuality. A monstrous depersonalization of man is yet another charge which American writers levy against the war.

In conclusion we have yet to touch upon those aspects of the war novel where the protest against war as the

source of immeasurable human suffering, sounds forth most strongly. This is achieved mainly through scrupulously detailed descriptions designed to evoke horror at the effects of war. The writer takes on the role of a reporter, inspecting every inch of the battlefield and recording everything that falls into his field of vision. The cruel, exact depiction of war, intended not to elevate reality but rather to approach it as closely as possible, reveals that Hemingway and Dos Passos have been well studied. Mailer, moreover, uses many of Dos Passos' devices, particularly the broad sociological commentary made possible by "the Time Machine"; this intensifies the publicistic qualities of the novel.

Often the narrative seems to be overloaded with naturalistic detail. But we should not judge it on the basis of how distressing or offensive such descriptions may be—the author deliberately wishes to evoke horror and revulsion. Rather we are concerned with how effectively these details lead the reader to ponder the prime cause of this human tragedy—the war as a means of destruction and death. And if, as we read, we shudder from pain and horror, we must remember that the writer expected even more from us.

The depiction of the horrors of war, the cities razed to the ground, the mutilated bodies, the wounded earth, the burdens and perils of life on the front, is part and parcel of the contemporary war novel. But in the literature of different countries, the accent differs in accordance with historical experience. Thus one writer will stress the need for revenging the sufferings of the victims, another will stress that the triumph over evil is achieved at a high cost or he will try to rouse the people to a selfless purging of that evil in order to save life itself.

In the American war novel the idea of the senseless cruelty of war is most prominent. For European and particularly for Soviet readers who have survived the horrors of the fascist invasion, the concentration camps and Gestapo torture chambers, this emphasis seems strange if not shocking, just as the idea of "a separate peace" invari-

ably gives rise to perplexity. But one must recall that although the name was the same, in America this was an utterly different war.

Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), generally considered by American critics as "black humor", is one of the novels structured on the theme of the senselessness of war. Through the entire novel, its protagonist, Yossarian, is busy inventing reasons for staying out of the air and avoiding missions. Much of this may be attributed to the thickheadedness of generals who are exclusively occupied with intriguing against each other and writing denunciations, to the venality of all ranks from the highest to the lowest, the stupidity of the whole war machine, and finally to outright treachery. What else could one call Milo's business concern, which not only makes incredible profits, openly trading on both sides of the front, but takes contracts for the bombing of Milo's own airbase—which his business concern carries out in the best way? One could hardly find a blacker picture to convey the imperialistic character of the war, which openly ignores the interests of humanity in the pursuit of business. A strong point of this book is its pitiless mockery of the vices inherent in the structure of the American army. Its hero is somewhat more complex a problem. Although there is no evidence to support the fact that Heller had the good soldier Schweik in mind when he created Yossarian, we can assume that he had something similar in mind. However, an insufficient understanding of the essence of World War II has had a negative effect on this novel. While Schweik displays the healthy common sense of the simple folk in his refusal to participate in an imperialistic war, Yossarian remains a philistine, unable to rise above personal concerns and anxieties in times of trouble. But in spite of all this Heller's obstinate hero is right in many respects. When Major Danby tries to persuade him not to run away and advises him to "look up at the big picture", Yossarian with good reason replies: "When I look up, I see people cashing in. I don't see heaven or saints or angels. I see people cashing in on every decent impulse

and every human tragedy.”²¹ There is a challenge in his refusal to serve the war machine and eventually become its victim; and Heller obviously insists that the reader consider Yossarian’s refusal *only* in these terms. But at the same time it illustrates the total indifference of this complete individualist to those very human tragedies to which he so passionately refers. It is this lack of principle that transforms Yossarian, in a certain sense, into the accomplice of those he condemns. His efforts to save himself, even at the price of desertion, speak of the extreme narrowness of Yossarian’s horizons. His passivity reveals the absence of any personal score with fascism; his vision is fixed at the level of Cathcarts and Korns:

“If I were to give up my life now, it wouldn’t be for my country. It would be for Cathcart and Korn. So I’m turning my bombsight in for duration. From now on I’m thinking only of me.”²² This is his reasoning. And it is a great pity that the writer was not able to rise above the level of his hero.

The motif of the senselessness of war is conveyed by other means in other works as well. It serves as the thematic base for a subplot of *The Naked and the Dead*, for example, when the author describes the unsuccessful raid of Croft’s detachment behind enemy lines to get information which will form the basis for a strategic operation to rout Japanese forces on the island of Anopopei. The operation ends about the time when the remaining members of the detachment, having suffered great losses without gathering the necessary information, manage to break through to their own men.

The outcome of this operation makes the theme even more evident. All of Cummings’ meticulously calculated strategies and tactical plans lose their value when it is discovered after the victory, that the Japanese soldiers who had been without food for many weeks, were in no condition to resist them; the majority of the casualties were already wounded men whom the American soldiers mercilessly slaughtered. This discovery transforms Cum-

tings' triumph into a Pyrrhic victory. The cheapening of this external victory undermines the general's formerly solid position with regard to the internal action. Lacking moral justification, he maintains this position only by virtue of his military authority. And now even this has been questioned.

It is curious that toward the end of the novel the prediction that the soldiers will take up arms against their hated officer-oppressors almost comes true. In one episode, Red is on the verge of killing Croft. In conjunction with the evaluation of Cummings' victory—executed with subtle sarcasm—this episode only serves to put greater emphasis on the internal inconsistency of Cummings' and Croft's position during combat, which by all rights should have affirmed the solidity of that position.

All the same, Red does not kill Croft. This is telling not only for Mailer's novel, but for all American novels of the Second World War. In the United States many authors have attempted to report honorably and accurately the terrible events of this war, to carry the lessons of this cruel world-wide struggle against fascism to future generations. In many ways they have succeeded. We can only hope that one day we will see a book whose hero, having passed through hell and death, emerges victorious with the "red badge of courage" and stands up in defence of all that is alive and beautiful on this earth.

NOTES

¹ John Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War*, Montreal, Bantam Books, 1960, pp. VII-VIII.

² Joseph J. Waldmeir, *American Novels of the Second World War*, The Hague, Paris, 1969, pp. 9-10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴ Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*, N.Y., Toronto, 1948, p. 78.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

- ⁹ Ibid., p. 321.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 175-76.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 159.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 164.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 717.
- ¹⁵ Mitchell Goodman, *The End of It*, N.Y., 1961, pp. 110-11.
- ¹⁶ John Hersey, *The War Lover*, N.Y., 1959, p. 82.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.
- ¹⁸ Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five or the Children's Crusade*,
A Seymour Lawrence Book, Delacorte Press, 1969, pp. 140-41.
- ¹⁹ Norman Mailer, op. cit., p. 176.
- ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 319-20.
- ²¹ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, p. 469.
- ²² Ibid., p. 470.

N. ANASTASYEV

HOPES AND FALSE HOPES*

"It is with fiction as with religion. It should present another world, but one to which we feel the tie."

HERMAN MELVILLE,
The Confidence Man

1. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Toward the end of the 1960s a certain shift appeared to take place in Soviet criticism of Western art and literature. A rather prominent if not leading role was played by those works of criticism which dealt with the phenomena and facts of art and letters in their direct and lasting relation to changes in social consciousness in the West today. Such were the objective demands of the times. It was apparent that in the last fifteen to twenty years Western art had displayed a dependence on life itself which had never before been felt so clearly. The proliferation of mass media, the New Left, student activism and the battle for civil rights, the new feminism and hippie communes—all these phenomena and many others met an energetic response in the arts. How beneficial this haste to respond, this direct proximity to reality proved to be is another question, but the fact itself is indisputable.

But here is the curious thing: in examining the latest tendencies in bourgeois culture, aesthetics and, generally speaking, in the attitude displayed by man in contempo-

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rary capitalist society, critics and sociologists reveal their projections with respect to the audio-visual arts, but almost totally ignore literature in their analyses. This is not meant as a reproach. Ultimately those works of which we are speaking concentrate precisely on shifts in social consciousness, and it is only natural that their authors should treat those forms of artistic consciousness which most sharply and directly reflect these shifts, forms such as underground film, happening, rock music and Pop art. Popular and neo-avantgarde literature are not nearly so impressive by comparison. To this day we are more likely to encounter various theoretical constructs and prognoses regarding literature than the real embodiments of such theories. But the variety is more likely to be terminological; the gist of all the predictions is clear: under conditions of a "post-industrial", "technocratic" and "consumer" society, literature is doomed to perish as something that is superfluous.

In her *Styles of Radical Will* Susan Sontag, the well-known New Left theoretician, asks whether art (in particular verbal art) is necessary, and answers decisively that art becomes the enemy of the artist, for it deprives him of the possibility of self-expression, of "transcendence". Not to mention Marshall McLuhan's gloomy invectives against literature, where he blames the "Gutenberg Galaxy" for arousing the principle of individualism which displaced "the collective unconscious" of the olden days.

Though expedient and necessary, the criticism of such ideas is lacking in something. It even fails to deal with a number of basic questions: is traditional literary art really on the decline? Is it not giving way under the pressure exerted by stereotypes of mass culture? Is it not losing its authority in the consciousness of its audience, which daily and hourly is flooded by an avalanche of information and cannot assimilate it, let alone have the time and strength to take in the artistic interpretation of reality? And does it always deal adequately and confidently with those new conditions forced on it by modern Western society?

These questions are by no means rhetorical in nature. They are posed in word and in print by people whom one does not suspect of destructive intentions with respect to art. One could quote, for example, C.P. Snow in his *Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*. If so eminent a writer and humanist can doubt the value and necessity of art and can justify the fact that "certain of us" reject it, it certainly forces us to stop and think.

And the arguments surrounding the literature of fact and imaginative literature—do they not also reflect in some way a certain distrust of traditional forms in the artistic cognition of man and his world? And are we right when we see in this distrust nothing more than the morose and senseless endeavors of aesthetic Luddites?

2. THE EXPANSION OF REALITY

Let us turn to the subject of American literature. "...The American sky which was once the topless empyrean of freedom, the American air which was once the living breath of liberty, are now become one vast down-crowding pressure to abolish them both, by destroying man's individuality as a man by (in that turn) destroying the last vestige of privacy without which man cannot be an individual. Our very architecture itself has warned us. Time was when you could see neither from inside nor from outside through the walls of our houses. Time is when you can see from inside out though still not from outside in through the walls. Time will be when you can do both. Then privacy will indeed be gone; he who is individual enough to want it even to change his shirt or bathe in, will be cursed by one universal American voice as subversive to the American way of life and the American flag."¹

These are the words of William Faulkner, and they were uttered some time ago—more than twenty years have passed—at the height of the cold war, which under Amer-

ican domestic conditions had brought on a suppression of civil rights, interference in the private lives of people, the suspension of traditional democratic freedoms, in a word, witch-hunting, McCarthyism. And evidently the practical danger of this phenomenon was so great that even a man like Faulkner, who shunned participation in contemporary affairs and jealously guarded his personal independence, thought it both possible and necessary to employ his authority as a world-renowned writer to point out this danger to his fellow countrymen.

And indeed the architecture of American residences did change with the coming of plastic and glass, which, to follow Faulkner's train of thought, opened up the private lives of men to the city and the world. But now even concrete walls with narrow embrasures in place of windows could not safeguard that privacy, for television waves could penetrate the thickest shell with the greatest of ease. The outside world has taken full advantage of the mass media to burst into man's private life, envelop it, and draw the individual into the whirl of public events.

Many decades were required for Abraham Lincoln to become firmly established in the consciousness of the nation as one of the outstanding figures of American history, for him to become a symbol of the struggle for democracy and human rights. John Kennedy, who like his predecessor in the White House was downed by an assassin's bullet, became a legend in the course of a few days: the funeral of the fallen president was transmitted by television, as well as the episode involving the transfer of Lee Harvey Oswald from prison to the court, during which time he was mortally wounded. The sorrow people felt at the death of the president was profound and sincere, but the theatrical aura surrounding his death inevitably relegated the related complex of social problems to the periphery of mass consciousness.

In the late sixties and early seventies bright-eyed theorists of "mass" society were confidently predicting a cloudless future for Americans, an imminent paradise whose

advent was assured by a steady growth in material potential and the development of technology. But with the passage of time a tragic paradox made itself felt more and more clearly: material well-being increased, or at least its prospects seemed real enough (though Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society", as we know, was never realized), but happiness, if by that we mean the freedom and flowering of the personality, was never found. Just the opposite, in fact. For it was precisely the gradually increasing span of leisure time that became the sphere of influence of mass culture as one of the objects of national consumption. Man fell into slavery, which was all the more tormenting because it looked voluntary. Ultimately this fact became so pronounced that it forced even the most unrestrained optimists to think twice. D. Bell, who already fifteen years ago had drawn up an apparently strict and unshakeable model for "post-industrial culture", now wrote an essay entitled "The End of Scarcity?", where the very interrogative intonation of the title betrayed the diminishing confidence of the author. Its meaning was just this, that yes, of course, material prosperity had increased, but the level of need had not in the least diminished, but rather had risen. What was needed now was free time. The absence of freedom had become so keenly felt that "utopian" visions had given way to visions of the Judgement Day.

The situation which had developed was still more painful for people devoted to the "old-fashioned" values of a culture centering on the arts and humanities, a fact easily inferred, for example, from the utterances of the well-known literary critic John W. Aldridge.

The effect of the development of a technological culture, an effect irrevocable in a bourgeois society, led also in particular to the rise of what is called "consumer consciousness". Sometimes it manifests itself in completely ordinary ways corresponding to its own substance; sometimes—certainly with no greater frequency but in any case more vociferously and obviously—it searches for a way out by rebelling, by attempting to overcome its grave

dependence on reality as it presents itself to the consumer consciousness in the signs of mass culture. At this point various counter-cultures and "revolutions"—"sexual", "psychedelic" and so on—spring up.

Undoubtedly the civil rights movement was one of the most significant developments in America during the past decade. The numerous freedom marches (one of the best known is the Great March on Washington in 1963, where Martin Luther King delivered his famous speech, "I Have a Dream" from the steps of the Capitol) became an indispensable feature of the life of the country. World fame descended on towns like Greenwood, Selma and Birmingham, where police force was used to break up peaceful demonstrations. The concept of civil disobedience, first espoused in America by Henry David Thoreau, was taken up with new force precisely in the black ghettos: those who had been persecuted and deprived of their civil rights took to the streets, joined by many who had keenly felt the "black shame" of America.

But already at the very wellsprings of the civil rights movement there was a dangerous factionalism, a confusion of purpose, a failure to unite with other democratic movements. These contradictions gradually intensified, leading to the formation of mutually hostile groups. Thoreau and Gandhi were replaced by new names and heroes espousing the ideas of uncompromizing violence, which at this particular stage were totally counterproductive for the movement. One of the leaders of the Black Panthers, the well-known publicist Eldridge Cleaver, went so far as to write in *Ramparts*, "I became a rapist.... It seemed to me that the act of rape was an insurrectionary act." The same ideas were expressed with emotion, and sometimes with frenzy approaching the absurd, by the black poet and dramatist LeRoi Jones as well as other troubadours of "black" protest.

In his recently published book, *Strategy for a Black Agenda. A Critique of New Theories of Liberation in the United States and Africa*, Henry Winston, the National Chairman of the Communist Party of the United States,

writes that the ideas of ultra-Left extremism inflicted substantial losses on the black movement and proved in essence to be the reverse side of the strategy of the white ruling class of the United States. This statement not only reveals the real contradictions in the black liberation movement, but what is particularly relevant to our present discussion, helps us to understand how this movement, directed *against* the establishment, proved suddenly to be subject to the influence of bourgeois fashion.

No, society did not in the least relinquish its chosen method of direct suppression—the tragic fate of King and Malcolm X is sad confirmation of that fact. But at the same time it used the trustworthy mass communication media to engage in “gentle battle”, standardizing and popularizing the ideas and the heroes of the protest movement. The profiles of Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael and H. Rapp Brown were splashed across television screens, national magazine covers and daily newspapers, merging together to form the image of a cult hero—side by side, say, with the silhouettes of Marilyn Monroe and Jacqueline Kennedy, a football coach, and the fashion designer responsible for the mini-skirt.

Concerning the student movement in general and the phenomena surrounding the New Left and its numerous modifications (the “sexual revolution”, hippie communes and so on), while acknowledging that it arose and took shape as a protest against the cruel institutions of bourgeois society, we must nevertheless note that this movement was also fairly quickly drawn into the same sphere of influence of “mass culture”.

Even the hippies with their manifestly unavailing but sincere and selfless impulses, their desire for seclusion and freedom from a society filled with falsehood and violence, soon entered the spotlight of public attention. The “Merry Pranksters” organized by Ken Kesey, a novelist, visionary and addict, acquired national notoriety thanks to the mass media. The same fate befell San Francisco’s Haight Ashbury. For the same reason tremendous publicity was given to Timothy Leary, “prophet” of the psychedelic revolution

and former professor in the natural sciences at Harvard University. Thanks to television and the newspapers the Woodstock Festival in New York turned into a sort of public demonstration of "commune" life. And finally we have the Manson gang with a film depicting in full color their ritual murder of Sharon Tate and her guests. This is an exceptional case, of course, but one that displays and confirms with terrifying clarity the unresolvable contradictoriness of the counter-culture, as a result of which it becomes the easy prey of mass culture.

3. "FACE TO FACE..."

As we mentioned earlier, in the sphere of artistic consciousness the various protest movements expressed themselves above all in new forms of theatre, film, music and painting. It is therefore hardly surprising that neo-avant-garde art (like its sources in reality) underwent the sad metamorphosis of popularization.

The most penetrating observers took note of this fact. One of the *maîtres* of American theatrical criticism, Robert Brustein, remarked for example that the avantgarde had become "careerist", totally predictable, and hence utterly boring, tiresome and unartistic.

The last notion is particularly remarkable, for it not only captures the evolution of the avantgarde, but also casts light on its very nature. This sort of art not only reflects a certain aspect of reality; in negating the principle of the individual and striving for the collective creative act, it actually crosses the boundary separating art from reality and removes the artistic aspect.

But it is time we returned to literature. Within the framework of the "happening" it proved fairly easy to break down the "fourth wall", and do it so thoroughly that both actors and spectators would be equally involved in the action. But literature creates a far more impressive barrier between the creator and the consumer; in any case the author as an individual plays too important a role for

literature to achieve the same degree of "co-creation" as in the "happening".

At times, however, the feeling arises that literature feels oppressed by this particular feature. In any case literature too has recently begun to manifest an irrepressible desire to merge with reality.

But what's so bad about that? The connection between reality and art, even the most direct, has never degraded art; on the contrary, it could have become a source of great creative inspiration.

On the other hand we also know that "art does not require that its works be taken for reality" (Lenin), that the artist not only reflects life, but transforms it; plays freely with time, indulges in fantasies, resorts to hyperbole and the grotesque, has no qualms about altering the real proportions of the depicted object—all in order to comprehend more fully and profoundly the true meaning of history and man's place in it. All these are principles of the aesthetics of realism.

At the same time at any given moment in the evolution of art the distance between it and reality does not remain constant, the degree of artistic freedom fluctuates, and the ways it is linked to life change. And this changeableness of relations depends not only on the individual temper of the creator, but on the character of life itself, which strives, however obscurely, to dictate its rules of the game to art.

Among the world's advanced literatures American fiction perhaps more than any other has felt this dependence, and has for a long time. In New England, as opposed, say, to old England, there were no such age-old traditions or legends. At the same time New England very early developed a cult of material prosperity and an ideology of success, which did absolutely nothing to promote the fine arts, but rather shifted them to the background of human creation.

Thus the relations between artistic thought—I am speaking of its democratic manifestation—and the bourgeois reality of America have been formed under conditions of

extreme tension ever since that thought reached a state of maturity. Take the nineteen twenties alone, for example. During this period of unrestrained material prosperity (which witnessed the birth of that famous aphorism, "The business of America is business"), which was accompanied by a catastrophic decline in moral values, literature appeared to distance itself from reality, isolating itself by means of a wholly palpable lyrical tissue (witness Anderson, Fitzgerald and Hemingway), or by means of experimental devices (John Dos Passos). Of course this was not a rejection of realism: though apparently withdrawing from life, literature in fact came closer to it, for it grasped it as a whole, exploring the deepest current of national life, and what is more, of being itself. In short one might say that literature revealed the groundlessness of the myth of the pioneers, the inadequacy of the Great American Dream, which in fact had turned into a spiritual nightmare.

It is not by chance that we brought up the twenties in this connection. The present situation in American life brings to mind in some ways that period fifty years ago with its industrial boom, its strong attack on spiritual values, the revision of old humanistic ideas which had been dealt a death blow by the First World War. We can easily understand why precisely this period first gave rise (especially in the works of the then popular economist and sociologist Thorstein B. Veblen) to the ideas of technocracy and managerism, which have been universally accepted in present-day post-industrial society.

Of course any comparison is unsatisfactory. So too this one. The quantitative increase in the "*summa technologiae*", the tremendous growth of the mass media and so on and so forth have inevitably altered the quality of their influence on the spiritual, including artistic, consciousness of the nation. The challenge to it, and to literature, has been set down with far greater insistence and determination than it was a half century ago, and art feels the persistent pressure of reality and its standards far more strongly than ever before.

Nonetheless authors like Alfred Kazin have not lost their faith in the written word:

"With so many agonies of contradiction in himself, not the brilliant novelist's lesser rhetoric will do—that just passes out symbols like party hats to surprise—but the patience and depth of fiction itself, dramatic imagination, the world reconstructed in that personal sense of time about which space centers, sex movements and all other plurals know nothing, but which is a writer's secret treasure."²

One must give due credit to the author for maintaining his faith in the vitality of literature; at a time when that vitality is being called into question from so many angles by so many writers, the position of the old critic appears particularly attractive.

But be that as it may, the present condition of American literature scarcely gives cause for unconditional optimism. The present generation of writers has abandoned the position assumed by the novelists of the twenties with respect to reality; the degree of resistance to the pressures of reigning bourgeois standards has declined considerably.

We are speaking here about serious realistic literature, the sort that is sincerely concerned about the standardization of society, the loss of individuality, the decline in moral values. Keenly sensing the troubled social climate of America, it strives both to reflect this situation and to counter it . . . and all too often reveals its own dependence on this reality. Why exactly is this so?

It can be explained in part by the movement of literature from fictional to documentary forms, a tendency long noted and regarded as a positive development. Indeed the publicistic works of former novelists and serious contemporary novelists like Capote, Mailer and Baldwin are a noticeable phenomenon in present-day American letters, and such works as *In Cold Blood*, *Advertisements for Myself* and *The Fire Next Time* are in no way inferior to such novels by the same authors as *The Grass Harp*, *An American Dream* and *Another Country*, and are per-

haps even superior in their ability to fathom the essence of the social experience. Mailer's formula (set under the title of his book *On the Steps of the Pentagon*) "History as a Novel, the Novel as History" confirms literary practice, and the "new journalism" in fact aspires to the position of literary leadership in the spiritual life of the American.

But the movement itself, despite all its indisputably impressive results, suggests thoughts which in my opinion are not entirely optimistic in tone, or at least not only optimistic. It seems to reflect a certain distrust in traditional imaginative literature, in its ability to comprehend the tremendously contradictory tendencies in reality, to understand and embody heroes of our times. Those who represent this movement claim that the artistic word sets too great a distance between the writer and life, which calls for direct participation in it.

This position is noble and not subject to dispute, but not beyond certain limits, those beyond which art ceases to exist, even when it lends itself to the formula "history as a novel". A rejection of the aesthetic assimilation of reality (no matter how varied the writer's tools) deprives the artist of the possibility and the right to judge reality, removes the great privilege of foresight, and forces him in large measure to accept the rules established by mass civilization independent of his participation. In becoming a popular figure he (not he, of course, but mass culture as his "agent") fulfils the paradoxical and, of course, tragic role of popularizing and reproducing those very ideas, notions and ways of life against which he has so actively and justly rebelled.

Mailer, the author of accurate and truthful journalistic accounts of American reality in the sixties, and Mailer, the front page hero of newspapers and magazines—the two seem incompatible, but alas, mass culture makes the two compatible. And understandably this is bound to leave its mark on the work of the writer. The creative and human aspect of James Baldwin is also marked by this contradiction. And I fear it was no accident that one of his latest

books, *No Name in the Street*, carried unpleasant notes of self-advertisement.

What can we conclude? In moving away from the artistic image and considering the position of the artist too "passive", American publicistic writing, despite all its successes, still affirmed the necessity of art, the necessity for a profound and integral aesthetic assimilation of reality. Recent American prose eloquently testifies to this fact. Under pressure from reality, it seemed to lose its way and set about busily searching for the man "shattered" by mass culture and thereby transformed into "halfperson"—and took to the path which, as we said earlier, even the "literature of fact" has sometimes failed to travel with merit: the path of reducing drastically the distance between itself and reality, an imaginary reality.

Perhaps the inadequacy of such a position is most clearly manifested when the novelist chooses to write about that sphere of life at whose depths Fashion reigns triumphant, where the rituals of modern myth-making are carried out.

For example Al Morgan, author of the novel *The Great Man*, keenly senses and experiences the oppressive moral influence of mass culture on the individual; soulless and intransigent, it crushes his creative impulses and steadfastly seeks to transform him into a "man of the crowd". But surprisingly enough, his novel, directed against mass culture, itself falls under its influence. But really, is it all that strange? The author relied too much on factual accuracy and too little on the artistic image. Rigidly restricting himself to the narrow confines of a TV commentator's studio, the world of show business, and the boudoirs of film stars, the writer denied himself access to the outside world and real life, which is scarcely perceptible in his book. In it there are investigations (of the reason for the success of "the great man", who is transformed from a simple country boy into an idol of millions of housewives) but the work itself does not investigate the true social and psychological reasons for such a transformation. There are no characters, only symbols. There are

no collisions, only situations standardized by mass culture. Yet the author himself set the stage for keen and psychologically interesting conflicts: Ed Harris, the narrator of the story, is faced with a dilemma: should he assume the throne of the fallen king (Herb Fuller, the "king", was killed in a car crash) or should he hurl a challenge at the system and make public the facts he has collected regarding his predecessor? Alas, the latter possibility remains unrealized (and not out of any lack of talent on the author's part, as I see it, but rather due to a false understanding of an aesthetic goal).

This is an extreme case, to be sure, but it is relevant, I repeat, in that it allows us to lay bare this particular tendency, which appears in the most varied types of prose, in the works of authors of the most different predilections. Only there is the pity of it, that the "aesthetics of the fact" levels these predilections and reduces all talent to a common, mediocre artistic level.

John O. Killens, a black prosaist and author of such novels as *Youngblood* and *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, both of which are well known to Soviet readers, recently published a new book entitled *The Cotillion or One Good Bull Is Half the Herd*. In it there are words which would appear to explain the mode of existence of many contemporary American works. The hero of the narrative, the young writer Ben Ali Lumumba (his regular name is far more prosaic—Ernest Billings, but in joining the advocates of "black power" he changed it to something that sounded better), this Ben Ali Lumumba turns up at a ball, in the course of which some brutal conflicts flare up between whites and blacks, between "moderate" blacks and extremists. He takes an active part in them, but at the same time he follows the proceedings with a certain detachment, for the subject of his future novel is unfolding before his eyes. "Through it all Lumumba faithfully kept a record of the little harmless incidents (we will see in a moment why these bloody brawls are called "little harmless incidents".—N. A.) in a notebook he had brought with him for the purpose of note-keeping. Getting

material for his novel. Rich material. Later, he would transfer it to his log, where he always made his nightly entries.”³

Thus life itself writes its own story, employing one of its own participants as an instrument. In order to underscore the illusion of authenticity Killens goes so far as to repudiate the authorship of Ben Ali himself (the device, of course, is by no means new, but here it has a special meaning: the narrated story is already a novel—or life, if you please), a fact about which we are forewarned in the introduction to the book. Of course Killens is an experienced novelist and has mastered the techniques of writing, and therefore he still maintains a certain artistic distance between the realities of the “black rebellion” and his description of them in the novel. This distance is assured by the obvious use of light intonations and even a certain comic element. This gives the impression that what he says is not to be taken too seriously—“Now he walked his Afro-American walk, masculine—like Africa, limp-stride, limp-stride, limp-stride, rock-roll, rock-roll, Jazz swing, rhythm-and-blues, all there in his crazy walk.”⁴

But behind the author’s somewhat flippant tone one can quickly detect that he is dead serious in professing the ideas of “black power” along with his hero. And the “little harmless incidents” are so called in order to maintain the style.

But the style, too, is not successfully maintained. Time and again Killens slips into a tone that recalls newspaper reporting, television commentary and even advertisements, all of which, as we mentioned earlier, have succeeded in making the “black rebellion” an element of mass culture. Actually the phrase “slips into” is not accurate, for it gives an impression of “error”. For in “distancing” the narrative to a slight degree the author nevertheless considers it his fundamental aesthetic task to fuse the very prose style with the style of life itself.

Hey!

Call her Yoruba, Right?

High priestess of the Nation!
You ready for that?
Negritude? Okay?
African queen!
Black and comely was this Harlem princess.
*Yoruba, her father named her.*⁵

Notice how the very fluctuations in intonation reproduce the clichés fashioned by the mass media: the advertising blurb (the heroine must be presented in such a way as to attract the reader or listener) is replaced by a note in a lyrical, minor key. Her story begins, and later the narrative will continue to be affected by similar changes in rhythm.

It is a known fact that names and concepts are jumbled together in a most astonishing fashion at the “revolutionary core” of the New Left and the “Black Power” movement. Trotsky, Mao, Lumumba, Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, and Ho Chi Minh are all lumped together. This chaos is accurately reproduced on the pages of Killens’ novel: “Men died for freedom and democracy and Blackness and liberation and communism and socialism and capitalism. Planes crashed, automobiles collided, casualties soared, especially on holidays. . . . Through it all the girls prepared for the Grand Cotillion.”⁶

Gibing? Not at all. We have here a copy of reality, the sign of a phenomenon whose internal contradiction has already been standardized by the punch press of the mass media, and in that form it has found its way on to the pages of the novel.

Finding themselves in such a stylistic element, the heroes of the narrative lose all individuality and are transformed into shadows that merely mimic the movements of real-life people. No wonder Yoruba so often stands in front of the mirror as though memorizing a part which has already been played by many others: the role of a black girl freeing herself of such “bourgeois” prejudices as modesty, kindness, and tolerance, and being trans-

formed into an advocate of black racism. Ben Ali himself is, of course, another Stokely Carmichael or Eldridge Cleaver or LeRoi Jones, the only difference being that he is not alive, but a creature also transformed into a sign or symbol.

The reader may be justified in asking what, in the end, does the plot consist of? What really goes on in the novel? Nothing, really. The whole narrative of *Cotillion* is a sort of happening, a chain of events, encounters, conversations overheard and espied on the streets of the city. The main theme, however, is the gradual awakening of the heroine to the truth, as the author sees it, of life. Only this process, which evidently has serious psychological implications, is also depersonalized, isolated from the personal experience of the heroine; it is simply a matter of a familiar situation being reproduced (and for that reason the word "process" above hardly corresponds to the real state of affairs). Such a situation demands no movement; static description suffices.

John O. Killens is an honest artist, no matter how false certain of his ideas may be. In general great care and tact is required when speaking about black American literature. In it one can almost tangibly feel the desire to restore the spiritual and cultural rights of a nation which for centuries has been regarded as inferior and which even now, especially in the South, continues to feel the pressure of the persistent traditions of white supremacists. From a psychological point of view, therefore, it is easy to understand the vehemence with which black publicists and prosaists affirm their people's worth, even those writers who cross the dangerous borderline of extremism in their works.

John Killens' book is based on false social concepts of "black power". And clearly it is this very factor which to a substantial degree makes his work liable to the influence of mass "consumer" consciousness. And the gist of the matter, I think, lies not only in fundamental misconceptions. The author's conscious endeavor to equate realism with reality plays no less a role. Like Al Morgan,

J. Killens puts too much trust in fact and relies too little on art and its internal strength.

Literature takes fragments of reality and finds the right characters, but is hard put to present an integral picture of the times with all its contradictions. These difficulties are inescapable; if you get too close to someone, you cannot make out his features. Art in this case runs the real risk of losing its own face, as is apparent, for example, in Arthur Hailey's novels on industry.

Similar tendencies make themselves keenly felt when literature takes up its so-called "eternal" themes—depicting the life of a young man, for example. Understandably enough, his life is always treated within the context of the movement of history, and literature has travelled a tremendous distance from, say, Werther to Holden Caulfield. But even Salinger's hero now appears to be more a creature of the fifties, for life changes much faster now than ever before, and literary heroes change with corresponding rapidity. But that is where the trouble lies. Holden Caulfield was an artistic discovery for the novelist, a real hero, whereas today in literature, that deals with the younger generation, we run time and again into characters acting out roles and plots that reality has provided ready-made. And this cannot help but reduce the truthfulness of the circumstances recreated by the writer, if by truthfulness we mean not the authenticity of the moment, but something more profound and long-lasting.

But after all, art could be playing a profound role in the spiritual life of the people today. Mass culture foists a standard style of life on man and endeavors to deprive him of the right and the possibility of intimate, individual experience; it gives rise to the cult of things, and makes the possession of material goods a sign of social prestige. People themselves, in John Aldridge's words, are transformed into a "mere statistical phenomenon". In such a social and moral atmosphere what besides art can constantly remind man that he is Man? But in order to fulfil this high calling, it must above all be reminded of its own worth. I have the feeling that literature, in its

desperate attempt to keep up with the times, does not take the necessary pains to examine the times in depth, and therefore simply reproduces fragments and images of life. Its attitude toward life may be expressed in various ways, depending on the viewpoint of the writer, but in any case the language of prose merges with the language of reality itself.

But then—what possible need can there be for literature? For under such conditions it consciously dooms itself to failure in competition with, say, the same means of mass communication, or even with purely traditional journalistic writing.

Not long ago *Saturday Review* published a story by one Marty Jezer about life in Vermont's "Total Loss" commune. The author had no literary pretensions in this story—it was written purely as a documentary reflecting the wholly characteristic evolution of a young rebel from the propagation of non-violent protest to the idea of violence, and from there to psychedelic mind expansion and finally to the commune with its free love and drugs. The meaning of life is found in "reality", which, one would hope, would be set off from bourgeois reality by a rigid frontier zone. "That reality was a mythic one, woven from mixed strands of fantasy, hyperbole, a vision of the Apocalypse, a sense of the absurd, and a generous portion of bull. . . . Everything we did, . . . was a magnificent achievement of cosmic significance. A walk to the mailbox was a journey through time."⁷

Perhaps the very ingenuousness of this narrative also explains why the counter-culture could be integrated so easily into the system of mass culture. When we read, say, those chapters from E. Kazan's novel *The Assassins* which describe the life of a "free family" of hippies, one cannot help but note how they correspond almost word for word with the picture drawn by M. Jezer. Not only is there a similarity in life style, but also in the very characters portrayed: Jezer himself, with his albeit sceptical (at the start, in any case) attitude toward the hippies' philosophy, clearly reminds us of Juana in *The Assassins*, and yet

another character in the novel, Winnie by name, a cruel and amoral man, reproduces the features of another member of the "Total Loss" commune, though naturally in exaggerated form. One could find even a closer living analogue to Kazan's character in the figure of Manson. Which immediately sets one to thinking—hasn't the situation depicted in *The Assassins* been subject to the preliminary processing of mass culture?

But one should be fair to the work. Beside the fact that the novel is masterfully constructed (Kazan's broad background in the cinema has had an obvious impact on the work) and makes exciting reading, one should note that the description of hippie life is by no means the author's main concern. He is primarily concerned with the atmosphere of violence reigning in society which victimizes people of the most various life styles and convictions, even those who, like Juana's father, Sergeant Flores, guard this society. In exploring this situation the author shows himself to be not only a skillful analyst, but also an artist and psychologist. All the more remarkable, then, that against this background unretouched stereotypes of reality itself should appear on the pages of this novel.

At this point I anticipate an objection: after all, we have been talking about writers who can scarcely be called first-rate.

So let us take an eminent writer, perhaps the most talented of those who made their literary debut in the sixties: John Updike. Already in his early work *Rabbit, Run* he was depicting the "little man" in America who instinctively feels his own helplessness before the faceless gargantuan reality surrounding him, and who in fact tries to run away from it, to save himself, to find peace and freedom. But Rabbit is running in circles, and life is constantly overtaking him, inflicting blow after blow.

We should note that this book appeared precisely at a time when visions of an utopian "society of abundance" were rising before Americans. And one of the outstanding virtues of Updike's prose and that of certain other writers of his generation was the steadfastly present feeling of

the crisis of the human spirit under conditions fostered by consumerism and commercialism. And there was something else: the sober and even brutal realism of these works was combined with a lyrical tone, clearly marking the presence of an artist with his depth of view and feeling.

Ten years later *Rabbit Redux* appeared. In it Updike returned to his former hero, Harry Angstrom, but naturally as he looked ten years later. What has happened to him in that time? As expected, he is more solid and now stands on firmer ground; he has found a well-paying job as a linotypist and has moved to the suburbs—a sign that he is a solid member of the middle class. He is now an integral part of the system—he views the war in Vietnam, for example, as inevitable and even necessary for the honor of the American flag.

But after completing this evolutionary process has the hero really found peace and well-being? Not at all. As before, he continues to suffer the blows of fortune. His wife leaves him, his house burns down and the young Jill, who had relieved Rabbit of his loneliness for days and months, perishes in the flames, and finally, he loses his job. At the end of the novel, it is true, Janice returns to him, but this is really nothing more than another lap in his endless running, a circle where small successes alternate with profound failures.

What the book says is clear, as, in general, is the author's attitude toward his hero and his story: though his compassion for Rabbit has not completely disappeared, it is stifled to a large extent by the spirit of rejection.

Spirit? Perhaps the word isn't fitting here. The point is that in Updike's new book the *artistic* spirit cedes its place to everyday life. The author has never restricted himself simply and exclusively to specific historical periods, but rather has always retained some space "for the author",—anyone who has read *The Centaur* will readily agree on this score.

In his latest novel this space has shrunk to the point that it is indiscernible. Updike has depicted the way of

life of the average American very accurately—the economic successes of the last decade have reconciled many people to life, and the author probably had no trouble finding any number of faceless “rabbits” all around him. But in this instance he limited himself to this fact, as a result of which the impact of reality overwhelmed the factor of art. Sometimes the author is successful, resists the temptation of the direct text, and announces himself, thus distancing himself through the medium of satire: “Pop stands whittled by the great American glare, squinting in the manna of blessings that come down from the government, shuffling from side to side in nervous happiness that his day’s work is done, that a beer is inside him, that Armstrong is above him, that the U.S. is the crown and stupefaction of human history. Like a piece of grit in the launching pad, he has done his part.”⁸ The epigraphs to each part of the book also serve the same aesthetic ends: they consist of documentary fragments reproducing the cosmic conversations of Shatalov and Volynov, Armstrong and Aldrin. The action of the book itself unfolds during the period of the first manned flight to the Moon and Updike needs the contrast between the great achievements of the human mind and the empty, petty lives of his heroes.

But too often we miss the artistic presence of the author; Updike mostly concentrates on the fact, the movement, the word, all of which are taken from life itself. The aesthetics of the book is primarily the aesthetics of the newspaper column and the six o’clock news—no wonder the text of the novel fairly bursts with quotations from essays and news reports. And at times the novelist merely relies on the resources of mass information, shifting his own responsibilities on them. Clearly this is a device, but a dangerous one, for once he has chosen this path, the writer also designs his heroes along the same lines. Jill is a girl who has left her rich parents and taken up the hippie life style; Skeeter is a pusher and a black racist; neither of them are live characters, but models cast in the mold, not even of life, but of mass culture. Their actions are programmed from the outside and deprived of inde-

pendence by the novelist. No wonder that sex plays such an inordinately large role in *Rabbit Redux*. This is nothing new for Updike, but earlier his frankness was determined by his aesthetic goals, and now it is dictated only by a falsely conceived necessity for the accurate reproduction of reality.

Updike's novel may serve in its own way as a synthesis of contemporary American prose. One writer devotes his novel to the "black rebellion", another describes the influence of the mass media, a third treats the youth movement and the counter-culture; Updike puts them all together, with the theme of space exploration thrown into the bargain. But the author's generalizations are illusory; he has given us a superficial and non-aesthetic treatment of modern America's gravest problem, one which indeed manifests itself in the most diverse streams of reality: the spiritual emptiness of the "consumer society".

4. THE INNER STRENGTH OF STYLE

According to Buffon's old aphorism, "Style is man". In the works of many American—and not only American—writers, style is regarded as something superfluous, and that undoubtedly explains why man is also absent in these works—not man as a character in some plot, but man as the ultimate and immutable purpose of art.

We have made it clear that we are speaking about a persistent tendency which threatens to deadlock literature. Literary criticism has detected this impasse—I have already quoted the works of John Aldridge and Alfred Kazin in this respect; artistic prose itself seems to feel it as it searches for new solutions in overcoming the delusions of the "literature of fact".

Not long ago Kurt Vonnegut published his *Breakfast of Champions*. As before the writer sees contemporary society as a kingdom where the machine reigns supreme; as before, only now, perhaps, with the added force of the grotesque, he examines the phenomenon of the techno-

cratic consciousness which cannot be reconciled with the individual manifestations of the human soul.

This idea is patently expressed in the book. "I tend to think of human beings (says the author in the introduction.—*N. A.*) as huge, rubbery test tubes, too, with chemical reactions seething inside."⁹

And to be ultimately sure that he has gotten the idea across the author cites the work of one of his characters, the science fiction writer Kilgore Trout: "You are surrounded by loving machines, hating machines, greedy machines, unselfish machines, brave machines, cowardly machines, truthful machines, lying machines, funny machines, solemn machines."¹⁰

This thought is consistently embodied in the very construction of the novel. The plot is completely conventional. In the course of the story various things happen, various stories are recalled, names and faces appear, and even certain realities are treated—the race problem, the great depression of the thirties—but all these are only signs and formulas of contemporary reality.

People are modelled in the same fashion. No matter how frightful and fantastic their actions may seem, they are nonetheless completely programmed and mechanical.

The word "model" here is deliberate. Vonnegut does not even *write* his work; he creates a copy of the times which is as artificial as reality itself. And incidentally, the device of creating models is not simple-minded, as it appears at first glance; in fact he bares the device in a considered and expedient fashion. Often he will set his characters to the side and take the floor himself in order to remind us that they are all constructs devised and introduced into the framework of the novel by the author himself, Kurt Vonnegut Junior, and that in neither word nor deed are they independent.

The artificiality of existence grotesquely reflected in the novel's structure is underscored by the author in other, completely visual ways. The narrative is accompanied by drawings done by the author himself. Here we see a beetle and a lamb, here a heron and a beaver, and each picture

is provided with an explanation of the simplest lexicographic type—like the reminder that there once existed simple, natural, primordial creatures now consigned to oblivion: “A beaver was actually a large rodent. It loved water, so it built dams.” Alongside these drawings there are others—triangles, prisms, cars, pistols. These are the signs of contemporary life, a universal language.

The satirical writer has no need to recall the details of everyday life; he intentionally abstracts himself from it and instead takes a characteristic feature of the times and sharply exaggerates it, thus creating a generalized image. Nor do you find daily occurrences in Vonnegut, but a cross-section of the mind of the philistine irresistibly drawn by the thinking patterns of the masses, daily and hourly subject to “robotization”, to the pressure of various social standards.

One is naturally inclined to ask whether the author himself is not swallowed up in the apocalypse he has created, whether he still believes in man and his ability to resist the evils of a technocratic bourgeois society. The question is all the more relevant in view of the fact that the writer, as we mentioned, himself intrudes in the narrative at times and even points to similarities between himself and his characters. We said too, of course, that this is a consciously chosen device, but after all, nothing can be taken in isolation in a work of art. . . .

But still, no matter how close the author is to the phenomena he describes, he is always set off from them by an invisible but sturdy wall, the wall of satirical style. The “I” of the novel is not yet the author, but the word and intonation and tempo of narration—here is the author, the artist who utterly rejects a soulless, “technotronic” existence and calls on his fellow countrymen to look about them and express their indignation at the established order of things.

Breakfast of Champions is a warning in the form of a novel, and as such it is closely related to the time and its problems; like the best works of Bellow, Updike, Cheever and O’Hara, it reflects the reaction of a humanistic

and artistic consciousness to the most dangerous result of "post-industrialism": the dehumanization of man in his public and private life. But where Updike himself, in his latest novel, shows how susceptible he is to the influence of mass culture, Vonnegut, employing purely artistic means, preserves his independence as a judge of society and can rise above the stereotypes of consumer consciousness. As a result his fantastical novel paradoxically contains more truth about life than Updike's book, where life announces its characteristic features in literally every line.

Flaubert speaks somewhere about the "inner strength of style", which, "like the earth", undergirds a work of art. These words have great topical importance for American prose today.

Style, of course, is not in the least obliged to be satirical. Moreover American literature in the past decade has shown that satire can have a completely different effect in different works, and can be applied to completely different ends. I cannot discuss black humor here, but I would simply like to note that no matter how accurate—I mean satirically accurate—such writers as Burroughs, Barth and Pynchon are in treating certain features of our times, the spirit of humanism is profoundly alien to them. The milieu of horrors they depict swallows them up, with the result that their works can be just as easily adapted to mass culture as books which depict life "in the forms of life itself".

But even when we are dealing with humanistic satire, it is still only a natural conclusion that the grotesque cannot serve as a universal means for fathoming reality. Now, as always, realistic art displays a wealth of styles.

In the past few years Joyce Carol Oates' popularity has grown at a tremendous pace. But it is apparent that this woman, still quite young, has a marked capacity for resisting the temptations that come with success; her attitude toward life and art remains ever serious, concentrated, even old-fashionedly earnest for our times. By her own admission she does not acknowledge "art for art's sake".

It is dangerous, of course, to trust an artist's pronouncements, and it would be difficult to find a formula applicable to all of Oates' work (for example, in her latest novel *Do With Me What You Will*, there is, in my opinion, an excessive concentration on feeling, on the "self-sufficiency" of psychological experience which is not totally accurate or balanced from an artistic point of view).

But in *A Garden of Earthly Delights* we do find a fairly accurate resolution to the creative problems sought after and formulated by this author. The novel's action and heroes are steeped in the reality of American life—at first the thirties, and then the present. The literary tradition of that decade is, of course, clearly reflected in the book—the picture of migrant workers driven from state to state by every wind that blows, quickly brings to mind corresponding episodes from *The Grapes of Wrath*. Clearly there is not the slightest trace of imitation here—the writer revives literature's interest in a sphere of reality it had long forgotten: artists are concerned about the spiritual poverty of the "society of abundance", but still its past antinomies have not been overcome, and the "society of abundance" creates a society of want on the other end of the spectrum.

Joyce Carol Oates depicts this "other America" in all its genuine cruelty: migrant labor transforming men into slaves of the soil, drinking bouts, knife fights between men and the piercing screams of women—all this we hear and see in the novel. But that is not all we hear. No matter how weighty the words chosen by the novelist, no matter how merciless and concrete the descriptions of the *Garden*, another intonation gradually comes through, one of heartfelt grief, and another style arises.

One could hardly say that such phrases as "his consciousness drains out", "the slow certainty that truths had for him now" and "mind eased to peace" could serve as signs of the spiritual condition of Carlton; he is too attached to his work, his actions and experiences too vulgar, simple and unambiguous. It is the writer herself who, in her

own words, "transforms" reality and creates a new world firmly attached to real life but set apart from it, like a dream. It is precisely this world which irresistibly attracts the heroine of the narrative, Carlton's daughter Clara, born in poverty and want and instinctively resisting this condition. At times her attraction to this world is expressed directly: "She could be moved by such things (an artless landscape on the cover of a box of candy—*N. A.*) but not reality, which was something that just lay stretched about her, indifferent and without meaning."¹¹

And though more often the girl's feelings do not seek such open expression, nonetheless one constantly remembers that she is living in an atmosphere where people and objects lose their real outline. Clara drives about the city and everything around her is familiar, but as soon as we read, "She saw heat glimmering over the road like figures dancing to distract her," a "marvelous garden of earthly delights" immediately arises, the only world in which Clara can breathe, though her face will always bear the imprint of the life to which she was born, though her feelings are undeveloped and even vulgar, though she is constantly in a dream world. It is no wonder that in this atmosphere a form of love arises that is so unusual that it can transform a totally ordinary bootlegger into a veritable Prince Charming.

But here is where the realistic exactness of Oates' prose makes itself felt, in that the sensation of real life never is lost: her prose is fashioned through an often indiscernible interweaving of reality and myth. This is not a device but a law. That is why when Clara's dreams inevitably disintegrate and she herself accepts the rules of that world from which she sought to escape, even then the narrative does not lose its poetry and illusory quality. The dreams remain to reproach the heroine, who ends her days in a private sanatorium for the mentally ill; they also remain as the heritage of Clara's son Steven, whom she calls Swan.

It is possible that Oates does not always maintain so pre-

cise a degree of artistry. It is possible that in a different literary context her books would smack of melodrama. But at the present time her work appears as a necessary affirmation of the value of literature as it exercises (to quote the words from Melville in the epigraph) its right to "present another world, but one to which we feel the tie".

What, then, awaits literature?

It is hard to make predictions where art is concerned. It is safer to appeal to past experience, to compare the present with what has already been experienced and assimilated. It is possible that statements regarding the future of literature might on these grounds acquire a firmer foundation (though they will inevitably, I repeat, remain hypothetical).

Literary periods replace each other more slowly than the generations of writers; their life span is different. But even when we make the appropriate corrections on the basis of artistic time, we must still acknowledge that realism has already entered its mature phase in American literature. It can boast many remarkable accomplishments in its hundred years of existence.

I would not presume to deduce a formula for the movement of contemporary American realistic art; I will only note that its strength and merit have always rested on its firm, close, traditional ties with reality. Though these ties have never implied the merging of literature and life, great artists have always discerned Life behind any given way of life.

Even when it apparently distanced itself from life, literature grew closer to it, for it grasped it as a whole, penetrated its depths, took shattered, fragmented pictures of everyday reality and restored them by means of a general artistic formula. This was its triumph.

This sort of breadth and independence, this ability to rise above the commonplace is just the thing, in my view, that is lacking in contemporary American literature, even among those artists—and they are many in number—who are sincerely and honestly concerned about the

dispirited state of mind of their fellow countrymen. Their works are oriented to various superficial aspects of reality, their fundamental ties with it have been weakened.

These ties must again be strengthened.

How? Obviously literature has to reassert its own sovereign rights. Only then will art be able to speak seriously and precisely about the age.

NOTES

¹ Faulkner, W. *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, London, 1967, pp. 72-73.

² Alfred Kazin, *Bright Book of Life. American Novelists and Story-tellers from Hemingway to Mailer*, N.Y., 1973, pp. 240-241.

³ John Oliver Killens, *The Cotillion or One Good Bull Is Half the Herd*, N.Y., 1971, p. 213.

⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

⁷ *Saturday Review of the Society*, February, 1973, p. 44.

⁸ John Updike, *Rabbit Redux*, N.Y., 1971, p. 11.

⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*, N.Y., 1973, p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 254.

¹¹ Joyce Carol Oates, *A Garden of Earthly Delights*, N.Y., 1969, pp. 202-03.

A. MULYARCHIK

CRITICAL REALISM IN THE POST-WAR AMERICAN NOVEL*

The three decades following the Second World War mark an intensive and somewhat motley segment of America's literary history. One may judge it first by the state of the novel which, together with the short story, became firmly entrenched as the leading literary genre of the century. Both renowned prosaists and newcomers continued to succumb to the dream of writing "the great American novel" and hoped to repeat the success of *An American Tragedy*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. But American literature reflects the intensifying crisis in bourgeois consciousness, a noticeable loss of integrity and vividness in the artistic experience, the growing doubt in the adequacy and effectiveness of art—these and many other socio-political factors characterize the epoch and at the same time express the immanent logic of human spiritual development. The "absolute identification of literature and life" professed by most American writers in the early twentieth century was followed by a more modest assessment of the expressive possibilities of art, a tendency to alienate the object depicted, and to employ conventional, subtle de-

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vices. The kaleidoscopic post-war literary climate, with an almost total absence of truly outstanding works of genius and the eroded boundaries of aesthetic movements, gives the impression that the American novel is short of breath. Still it would be unfair to say that the novel lacked talented exponents, or that it lost its significance as a genre capable of expressing social changes and the national character of the American people:

“In the years since the end of World War II the novel in America has been nihilistic, existential, apocalyptic, psychological; it has asserted the romantic self; it has recorded the loss of the self; it has explored the possibilities of social accommodation; it has withdrawn from social considerations; it has been radical and conservative. In form it has been loosely picaresque; it has returned to its beginnings in myth; it has been contrived with a cunningness of technique virtually decadent; it has been purely self-reflexive and respondent to its own development. And the novel has died.”¹

This “snapshot” of contradictory and at times paradoxical trends in post-war prose belongs to Marcus Klein, one of the more eminent scholars in the field. While one can agree with certain of the critic’s observations, one must definitely reject the notion that the novel is a dead genre. For Klein, the history of the contemporary American novel is first of all “a series of losses and creative defeats” and on the whole a portrait of “dissolution and dubiety”.² “Landscapes of nightmare” (in the words of Jonathan Baumbach) do to a great extent define the panorama of the post-war American novel which was significantly influenced first by existentialism, and then gave prominence to works of “black humor”, as a distinctive offshoot of the aesthetics of the absurd. Still critical realism remained the heart of American prose, as in the years of its “second flowering” in the era between the two world wars. For in all its wealth of form and the variety of individual talents, the literature of critical realism refused to become reconciled to the social and moral evils of the times.

Striving to reproduce reality not only by imitating life but by reflecting essential inner relationships, the realistic writer by the very nature of his chosen creative approach is consistently obliged to perform a twofold task; he must, as F. Scott Fitzgerald put it, view the world with "double vision". Apart from criticizing abnormal, senseless aspects of social structures and human psychology which continue to block the path of history, he is "entitled" to reflect upon an ideal that is feasible and accessible to his contemporaries, upon the harmonization and humanization of all forms of life. To the degree that such a dialectic perception of a complex dynamic reality becomes an organic part of the work of a writer, we measure his talent; for this is the most important criterion of the artistry and vitality of his creations.

In the thirty years that follow the last war we witness the further development and struggle of two views of history and contemporary events, opposed in principle, but based on a common aesthetic goal whose foundation had been laid in American literature by the early forties. We speak here of the "social novel", the central genre of the twenties and thirties at which time it reached its highest artistic level. Based on pessimism and a lack of faith, these works that dealt with social protest were often steeped in sorrow and despair. Van Wyck Brooks, the elder of liberal-democratic criticism, noted in 1941 that: "...even where, as in many cases, these writers are fighting for social justice, they still picture life as hardly worth the trouble of fighting for it. Their tone is cynical, bleak, hard-boiled, hard-bitten, and life for them is vain, dark and empty, the plaything, in Theodore Dreiser's phrase, of 'idle rocking forces' or currents of material interest. . . . Today (they) seem to delight in kicking their world to pieces, as if civilization were all a pretence and everything noble a humbug."³

But after the war, the social reality of the United States, still based on the bitter antagonism and the opposition of class forces, undergoes substantial changes; the facts of social and personal life from which literature

draws its material become increasingly more complex and, at times, ambiguous. Many writers of the older generation were simply lost in the new environment and could never develop new systems of social and moral evaluations. The persistent search for "the nerve of the age", indispensable to any serious writer, led some to a conventionalized, parabolic, allegorical prose and others to the extremes of uninspired naturalism; many, though they themselves were not aware of it, substituted didacticism for art, dealing in the stereotypes and situations of the recent past. In the forties and fifties almost every prominent writer of the "golden age" between world wars suffered a crisis. We see this in the prose of Dos Passos, Steinbeck, James Farrel, Erskine Caldwell and to a lesser degree in the works of Hemingway and Faulkner. The war novel, built above all on "the lessons of Hemingway" and for a time uniting many promising young talents, ascends briefly and then declines. In contrast, a "new prose" emerges, replacing socially oriented views with exaggerated aestheticism, persistent excursions into the subconscious and psychopathology.

Any criticism of the bourgeois structure, fraught with countless threats to the human personality, must have a constructive basis lest the writer's work become permeated with despair and nihilism which in turn become apathy and spiritual bankruptcy. During the post-war years this happened to Nelson Algren, Richard Wright, and Willard Motley. The same tendency is evident in the overwhelming conformism of "the age of Wouk" (as Maxwell Geismar calls it) in the works of the young Norman Mailer, Paul Bowles, and James Jones. True, the ascent of the "beat" writers on America's literary horizon provided a stimulant, shaking up the literary scene with its sharply critical viewpoint. The stormy rebellion of "angry young men", despite its great emotional repercussions, bore little creative fruit. The short-lived glory of the beat generation was due to a psychological vacuum which increased as McCarthyism faded away. The mental equilibrium of the creative intelligentsia, shaken by

the cold war and a sense of the approaching end of the world, by over-zealous attacks on those "of a different persuasion", is restored to some degree only at the beginning of the last decade. At precisely the same time, a second trend emerges in the post-war "social novel"; a new, brighter part of the literary rainbow appears on the horizon.

The literature of naturalism, the novels depicting violence, with their hoarse, hysterical, sickly intonations are challenged by a more thoughtful, balanced literary approach to the depiction of reality. Rejecting neither criticism nor the expression of heartfelt sympathy; saddened by the darker side of life; condemning fundamental defects in the social order and human nature, such as thirst for profit, social inequality, egoism and bankruptcy of spirit—these humanistic, life-affirming writers do not lose faith in the future, nor do they give up the present for lost. Their common aesthetic base is, of course, realism, a critical realism enriched by the many artistic discoveries of the twentieth century and, most importantly, imbued with a philosophically inspired spirit of "anti-pessimism". Under the present social conditions in the West, with its varieties of social viewpoints, its influential network of mass media and propaganda, the accelerated tempo of life and surfeit of impressions, it is all the more difficult for a writer to fill the role of arbiter and teacher which literature by nature demands of him. Overcoming the deeply rooted positivistic dogma of social and psychological predestination, instinctively choosing the true course amid a chaos of viewpoints, slogans and fashions, the contemporary American literature of critical realism attempts to combine everyday individual and social experience with the cumulative spiritual and moral wealth of humanity. Following in the footsteps of William Faulkner who in his Nobel Prize speech refused to acknowledge the imminent destruction of mankind, these prosaists affirm the desirability and possibility of social progress, where a simple American will be able to actively determine his own fate.

Toward the mid-seventies this movement, one of the best represented in contemporary American literature, includes most of those talented writers who debuted during or after the Second World War. Among them are the so-called "young novelists" (who retain this appellation regardless of the implacable march of time)—J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, James Baldwin and William Styron; it also includes those who began writing in the last 10-15 years—John Updike, Philip Roth, Reynolds Price, Joyce Carol Oates and John Gardner. These names in many respects set the trends of spiritual life in America on the threshold of the last quarter of the twentieth century. But amid the despair, confusion, and caustic misanthropy of the first years after the Second World War, only a few voices called for benevolent human feelings. Only a few were able to pierce the growing darkness. The axial line of critical realism's development in the American novel at this stage is the struggle of an inspired principle: the defence of man's worth against traditional negativism.

* * *

During the Second World War realistic literature was not particularly successful in the United States. There seemed to be a halt in the triumphant march of that socially-oriented prose that had dominated the preceding "red decade". This somewhat dismayed the critics. The appearance of new "muckrakers" such as A. Wolfert and Arthur Miller only made the weakened social vision of such acknowledged masters of critical realism as Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Caldwell, and Saroyan more evident. Hemingway's lengthy silence, broken from time to time by ambiguous interviews and rumors, which added nothing to this remarkable artist's reputation, was cause of concern.

Steinbeck's unexpected return, in *Cannery Row* (1945), to the stylistics and characters of his quasi-bucolic tale *Tortilla Flat* (1935) shows the disillusionment of the auth-

or of *The Grapes of Wrath* with the ideals and effectiveness of socially oriented art. Dos Passos and Farrel suffer a creative slump in these years. Erskine Caldwell's first post-war novels are likewise insignificant, and it seems that the author is content to rest on the laurels of his tremendously popular early works put out in the newly conceived "pocket-book" editions. In 1945, American literature loses Dreiser. *The Bulwark*, his last novel, sheds light on many important developments in the viewpoints of Americans in those years.

The religious and mystical motifs of *The Bulwark's* final chapters do not (as Lionell Trilling suggests in his sensationalistic essay "Reality in America") reflect a radical reexamination of all of Dreiser's previous conceptions of the social responsibility of the novelist and the historical determinism of his work. However in the "conversion" of Solon Barnes, the protagonist, those who reduce the higher meaning of art to a crude reproduction of reality in its sociological interpretation, tried to see signs of disintegration of the author's consistently materialistic points of view, the abandonment of earlier positions. It is true *The Bulwark* lacks many devices which characterized Dreiser's earlier novels, those written at the turn of the century. His insatiable passion for detailed backgrounds is no longer evident. The action is shifted from the big "city of the yellow devil" to a semi-idyllic province of Pennsylvania. As before, social Darwinism forms the basis of Dreiser's naturphilosophie, but just like in his masterpiece *An American Tragedy*, in *The Bulwark* the deliberately strong colors and mechanical depiction of interacting phenomena disappear. Published in 1945 at the chronological boundary of two literary epochs, *The Bulwark* already contains in embryo all the intonations peculiar to the post-war realistic novel.

The school of the "social novel" (whose most prominent representative was Dreiser) is continued in the mid-forties by Robert Penn Warren. His novel *All the King's Men* presents a superb analysis of the Americanized fas-

cism whose "call" inspired millions of men-in-the-street to follow the perilous path of supporting a regime of "great power". From another perspective, certain concessions made by Dreiser to "empty pietism" (as Trilling calls it) in *The Bulwark* pointed to the growth of tendencies that hastened the ripening of the so-called "pure prose", the apolitical and asocial literature of aesthetic and ethical individualism.

The attention to man's inner world which united many writers during the first post-war years into a "Southern school" (including Truman Capote, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor) still has nothing in common with the polemical denial of realism's significance and rejection of artistic engagement which reactionary, chauvinistic publicists turned into a political campaign, at times having nothing in common with literary scholarship. In the spirit of the conservative conceptions of Bernard de Voto and Lionell Trilling, such significant realistic works as Steinbeck's *The Wayward Bus* (1947) and Sinclair Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal* (1947) were subject to harsh condemnation. In "An Open Letter to the Realists", critic T. Canby asserts that the days of realism and naturalism in post-war America are numbered.

Despite attacks by "patriotic" critics urging the promulgation of the businessman as a positive literary hero, despite the noisy testimonials for "neogothic" prose with its sweetly romantic or monstrous legends, one cannot claim that the social orientation entirely disappears from American literature in this period. Unlike Steinbeck's wayward bus that departs from "a settlement of rebels" and heads toward a station called "St. John the Baptist", the American novel by no means keeps to its path. War novels lend the genre a specific color. The works of Mailer, Irwin Shaw, Vance Bourjaily, and John Hersey (including his documentary *Hiroshima* published in 1946, and *The Wall* published in 1950) all provide a powerful alternative to an escapist literature.

The war novels of the late forties and early fifties emphasize socio-political concerns, and their artistic meth-

odology draws upon a contradictory blend of naturalistic and realistic elements.

The war novel does not so much depict the war as the American army. But it would be a mistake to abide by the rigid classification made by Charles Eisinger in his monograph *The Fiction of the Forties* where this literary-historical phenomenon is reduced to two categories: novels which negate the American war machine and novels which affirm it. The nihilistic protests against all violence and any army in Robert Lowry's *Casualty* (1946) should not be identified with the principal criticism of the army as a part of bourgeois civilization made by Norman Mailer in *The Naked and the Dead* (1948). Furthermore one must distinguish between apologetic bestsellers (such as Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*) which developed into the inflammatory, cold war propaganda of a "peremptory strike" and democratic, anti-fascist works such as Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* (1948), the books of John Hersey, Anton Myrer, Joseph Heller, and others.

A certain internal affinity between the works of war novelists developed not only in view of their common theme, but due to their common dependency on the best examples of the rebellious, exposé-oriented prose of the twenties and thirties. Hemingway, Dos Passos and Farrel taught Mailer, Jones, Bourjaily and Lowry who in their novels resurrected the "intonations of despair and grief" to which Van Wyck Brooks alluded some years before. Young novelists just entering the literary arena came to the extraordinarily painful conclusion that, in the words of their first analyst John Aldridge, a basic result of the recently ended war was "...the disappearance of a stable society and a common set of values".⁴

Disillusionment in the power of social theories to analyze the causes and effects of historical developments led to an increased interest in the concrete—if unorganized—facts of "daily life" and brought many of the younger generation of novelists into the camp of those who fa-

vored the aesthetic views of naturalism. Whatever its subject—be it war, peace, former ghetto dwellers, or the middle class—the main theme of the twentieth century classic American novel is the problem of man and circumstances. Studs Lonigan, Henry Morgan, the heroes of Dos Passos' *U.S.A.*, and even Robert Jordan all at one time or another conclude that man is confined by the iron ring of his life's cycle, that any attempt to escape fate and enter a different system of existential dimensions will lead to dire consequences and more likely than not to death. These conceptions of social and biological determinism which form the kernel of the naturalistic view of life were to a great extent inherited by the war novelists.

In strict accordance with predetermined social parameters, for example, a gallery of characters is created in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Borrowing Dos Passos' device "the Time Machine", Mailer provides each personage with a preliminary characterization from which one may predict his fate. Although each man's fate may differ, on the whole—according to Mailer—the lives of Americans proceed along a course marked by fatality and doom: "He was feeling a deep and familiar bitterness; everything turned out lousy for him sooner or later. His mouth tightened. No matter what he tried, no matter how hard he worked, he seemed always to be caught. The bitterness became sharper, flooded him for a moment. There was something he wanted, something he could feel and it was always teasing him and disappearing."⁵ Private Gallagher's feelings, anxieties and sufferings are the same as those of almost every one of Mailer's heroes.

Naturalism has many faces; in post-war America it is manifested in the complex, factual novels of John O'Hara, in Algren and Motley's stress on the baser elements of human nature, and in the Olympian serenity of the war novelists, who liken life to a great chessboard and men to chesspieces whose maneuvers are directed by blind fate. Nevertheless the best of the war novels (in particular those of Mailer and Jones) cannot be classified as unadul-

terated naturalism, for apart from a rigid schematism in the choice of various motivations, they also express acute distress at man's problems and a readiness to share in and alleviate his suffering; this marks a break with naturalistic impassivity.

The impressive volume of war prose and the many talented war novelists seemed to indicate a promising start for young American literateurs. But after a decade of prose, only James Jones, in his novella *The Pistol* (1958) and his novel *The Thin Red Line* (1962), proved faithful to previous themes and style. With some justification, John Aldridge attributes the disintegration of this group of war writers to the exhaustion of their storehouse of direct observations on the war, as well as to a change in the spiritual and political climate of the country: "In place of a tangible and readily usable subject, the period has given us the indefinite suspensions and equivocations of the Cold War against an emotional background of alternating and even at moments coexisting anxiety and apathy. . . . There can be no question of experiencing the Cold War in any of the old vigorous senses of the word. One simply endures it, waits it out, and in the end gives over the mind to the protective custody of its own resources, its own power to enforce sanity and order within the closed precincts of the creative work of art."⁶

In 1951, when Jones' classic war novel *From Here to Eternity* was still in print, and some literary scholars had not yet lost faith in the power of the socially critical American novel, the concept of "conformity" had already begun to develop into a formidable literary trend. True, in Southern California the school of a new literary bohemia, to be known as the beat writers, already was in force, and in New York Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, though not immediately recognized by the critics, had already been published. But the general literary situation changed substantially in the fifties. In that decade when Americans became "a lonely crowd" and "a silent generation", the main current of American prose shifted from the depiction of the hard truths of life to a

glossy pseudorealism, "from rebellion to conformity", in the words of Maxwell Geismar.

The transformation which the intellectual life of the United States underwent during the latest "red scare" transformed in turn the features of America's literary map. A significant part of publications bore the clear marks of current political events. In particular, one notes the appearance of novels depicting a clash of military colossi and the atomic destruction of mankind, a genre which we shall call "atomic-utopian". The first example of this genre is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451°* (1950), followed by Burdick and Whiller's *Fail-Safe* (1962), and Knebel and Bailey's *Seven Days in May* (1961).

Many novels concerned with contemporary reality were obliged, at times in a purely publicistic vein, to evaluate two opposing ideologies; at the time a good many American writers were against Communism. There were still "shades of difference", ranging from the bitter hatred in W. Chambers' *The Witness* (1952) and caustic bitterness of Richard Wright's *The Outsider* (1953) to the contradictory works of Norman Mailer—*Barbary Shore* (1951), *The Deer Park* (1955)—and of Mary McCarthy—*The Oasis* (1949) and *The Groves of Academe* (1952).

Progressive, anti-imperialistic American literature endured the burdens laid upon it by inauspicious political conditions and the prejudices of publishers, although it could not increase its influence on the reading public. Even hostile critics had to mention the appearance of such books as Lloyd L. Brown's *Iron City* (1951), Alexander Saxton's *The Great Midland* (1948), as well as the novels of Albert Maltz and Lars Lawrence. However books such as these, offering biting social commentary on contemporary problems, were often overshadowed by the sensational publicity that accompanied the appearance of the bestsellers of Cameron Hawley, Sloan Wilson, and Herman Wouk, books only pretending to deal with actual problems. Placing the positive values of "true American-

ism" in opposition to the radical spirit of the thirties, Wouk and other literary conformists elevated loyalty to the status quo to a position which, if unromantic, was nevertheless the only possible practical direction for our time in their opinion. Marxist criticism accurately diagnosed these literary mirages, clothed in pseudo-realism; the magazine *Masses and Mainstream* in its editorial "The Wouk Mutiny" describes it thus: "A terrible sickness of spirit has in the past decade of cold war affected many of the country's most talented writers. . . . The reactionaries in literature have proved themselves more canny than we may have supposed. . . . They have sensed a hunger in people for values and for direction."⁷

But even the extreme apathy of Eisenhower's America, strangled by McCarthyism, could not uproot from a certain portion of American literature that constructive approach to the tasks of the age, that striving for the ideal, which instilled already in the nineteenth century. The correlation of dark and light, faith and disbelief differs in the new books of Hemingway (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 1952) and Faulkner (*Intruder in the Dust*, 1947; *A Fable*, 1950), in the novels of William Styron (*Lie Down in Darkness*, 1951), of Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*, 1952) and Saul Bellow (*The Adventures of Augie March*, 1953); but taken as a whole they oppose the conformity, the mundane descriptions of everyday life, and the hopeless nihilism of their contemporaries.

Thus from the beginning of the fifties, one notes the gradual emergence of a new sort of critical realism in American literature, whose direction according to its theoreticians may be expressed as follows: "...confronting the inequalities and brutalities of our society forthrightly, but yet thrusting forth its images of hope, human fraternity and individual self-realization . . . there must be possible a fiction which, leaving sociology to the scientists, can arrive at the truth about the human condition, here and now, with all the bright magic of a fairy tale".⁸

This new trend is hardly the result of a transplanted existentialism, as some American critics contend; rather

it represents a struggle against the tragic existential viewpoint to which such great talents as Richard Wright and Norman Mailer paid generous tribute in the fifties. The works of Cheever, Salinger, Bellow and Styron, as well as those of Malamud, Baldwin and Updike, whose first novels appeared somewhat later, demonstrate a stronger positive moral basis. Their heroes seek salvation through spiritual integration with other human beings. They break free of the charmed circle of fruitless individualism. Cass Kinsolving, who in William Styron's *Set This House on Fire* chooses "being" over "nothingness", serves as a model for the spiritual quests of many American writers who remain true to the tradition of humanism.

Together with the works of those who wrote "inspired" and "moral" critical realism, the beat movement of the late fifties also served to undermine the foundations of conformist literature. The peculiar microperiod of *Sturm und Drang* that falls within this movement cleared the literary horizons of the United States and roused those critics who had despaired during "the age of Wouk". One might say this movement "provoked" readers to take an interest in more substantial and serious works of American prose. The curses and moans of "the beat generation" shattered the aura of complacency and intellectual torpor, but beat literature did not offer any practical alternative. The same "howl" resounded in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg and the novels of Jack Kerouac: an all-encompassing, sincere protest whose emotionalism could not conceal the lack of perspective inherent in this abstract, ethical approach to American life. The one feature, a "red badge of courage", which sets Kerouac in contrast to the conformists as well as to the uninspired imitators of reality, is his desire to affirm ideals of universal goodness and love in a hypocritical world. At the time, the ethical sermons and peculiar social mysticism relating the beats with the prose of Salinger could still serve as moral solace for hungry minds and devastated hearts. The rapid disappearance of the beat writers from the literary foreground of America was due to more than

a simple reaction from a sated public. Growing feelings of opposition and the intensification of social action in the country called on American writers to abandon elitism and subjectivity.

The nation's exhaustion after an epoch of extreme individualism and total pessimism as well as an acute sense of a need for moral principles had a salutary effect on the work of many writers of the older generation in the late fifties and early sixties. In *The Mansion* (1959), Faulkner introduces positive social values in the person of communist Linda Snopes who manages to crowd the "positive hero" Gavin Stevens off his usual pedestal. After a long stretch of failures, writers like John Steinbeck (*The Winter of Our Discontent*, 1961) and Erskine Caldwell (*Jenny by Nature*, 1961; *Close to Home*, 1962) compose their finest works, where they strive to do everything possible to avoid extinguishing the smallest spark of human hope. Shortly before her death, Carson McCullers completes one of her best novels, *Clock Without Hands* (1961) where for perhaps the first time she subordinates metaphysical reflections on the tragic isolation of her characters to the theme of the necessity for spiritual intimacy and mutual understanding among people of different convictions and different races.

The theme of the moral elevation of man serves as the basis for the works of most realists in the late fifties and early sixties. We leave the heroes of Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* (1957) and *A New Life* (1961), of Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) and *Herzog* (1964), of Updike's *The Centaur* (1963); Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) and Reynolds Price's *A Long and Happy Life* (1962) at the moment where there is hope that their fate will improve. The silver linings which they see around the thunder clouds have nothing in common with the banal happy ending of traditional popular literature. The authors of both *The Centaur* and *Herzog* fit their moral criteria to a sufficiently wide range of facts gleaned from reality. The tragic stoicism and concealed optimism which lend color to the teacher Caldwell and, on a

somewhat reduced scale, to the main character of Bellow's novel stem directly from the contradictions of American life, the dialectic of the interrelation of character and environment. In this light the mythological façade of *The Centaur* and certain conventional devices employed for satirical purposes in *Herzog* do not contradict the aesthetics of realism but rather serve to enrich it and to make it more profound.

The thoughtful approach to the growing number of contrasting phenomena in post-war America and the torrent of opposition that burst forth in the sixties assume various artistic forms, many of them, it goes without saying, will not lead to an aesthetic of realism. Theoreticians and artists of the avant-garde of this period rallied behind the literary banner of the "absurd", "the new amorality", the novel of "destruction", and "black humor". In the works of Thomas Pynchon, James Purdy, Donald Barthelme and John Barth, a system of motivations arises which is totally alien to that of realism, a unique sort of anti-world which stands in opposition to all traditional human relations. The main feature of this outlook is the rejection of bourgeois civilization, but not in the name of a more perfect social structure. William Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* (1959) may be reduced to the chronicle of a sick, hallucinating consciousness; at times the humanistic plan of Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965) is stifled by his frequent outrageous deviations from social and psychological norms.

In the complex epoch of the sixties when traditions were broken and foundations were shaken, the American artist was faced with a dilemma. He could either show a world turned inside-out, a world in total opposition to all that exists, or he had to seek a complex synthesis of the actual problems of the day. After meeting the challenge of the "black humorists", writers of critical realism were obliged to defend the integrity of their ideological and artistic position, first in an internal polemic with those who like Herbert Selby and John Rechy represent

the "new wave" of naturalism, and then against the so-called "popular" literature that feeds like a parasite on the living tree of realism. If outright pulp such as the novels of Harold Robbins, Jacqueline Susann, H. Sutton and their fellows does not merit the attention of serious critics and more demanding readers, other works more ably assumed the façade of sociological and factual research into the changing aspects of America; these latter frequently meet with great, even sensational success. But Mario Puzo in *The Godfather* (1969), Arthur Hailey in *Airport* (1968), and Louis Auchincloss in his cycle of novels on "the world of profit" only skim the surface of phenomena, creating the simplified, belletristic likeness of "a sick society", as the United States is often called in our day.

The general crisis of the American mind has noticeably lowered the interest in the abstract, metaphysical-existential problematics of "black humor"; once again literature connected with the traditions of the "angry" thirties has come to the foreground. An entire group of young writers have experienced the beneficial influence of the realistic art developed in the period between world wars, including Robert Stone in *A Hall of Mirrors* (1967), and Leonard Gardner in *Fat City* (1969). These novels remind us that poverty, misfortune, and social conflicts are still alive and painful. One may trace a living bond with the classics of critical realism of the early twentieth century in Philip Roth's *When She Was Good* (1967), a novel dealing with the simple people of a provincial town. This bond is particularly evident in the novels of Joyce Carol Oates who has quickly developed from a "rising star" to one of the leading lights of the literary world. In her novels *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), *Them* (1969), *Do With Me What You Will* (1973), and the collections of short stories *The Wheel of Love* (1970), and *Marriages and Infidelities* (1972) she has managed, while avoiding a cheerless economic determinism, to show the true life situation of America's working people and to present a faithful picture of the infinite-

ly complex socio-psychological reality in which the present generation of Americans suddenly found itself, and this discovery was almost too sudden.

The progressive drain of the country's spiritual potential; the conflict between viewpoints of different generations, the intensification of interracial and social conflicts whose bitterness could not be concealed by the deceptive rouge of this "affluent society"—these were the problems that the literature of critical realism dealt with in those years when American intervention in Vietnam served as a kind of catalyst, speeding up and dramatizing many processes in the country's internal life. It is symptomatic that abstract-emotional inspiration, often bordering on starry-eyed idealism, is more taken for a past phase; the major emphasis has passed from abstract morality to concrete social and occasionally even political conclusions: "One thing I've learned, . . . there's no such thing as an unpolitical man. . . . You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed. . . . Where there's no fight for it, there's no freedom."⁹

These words of the innocent victim, Yakov Bok, from Bernard Malamud's novel *The Fixer* (1966) described, as we can judge, the mood of both radical, young America, entering into a cruel skirmish with the bourgeois establishment, and of the more measured liberal-democratic intelligentsia among whom the fundamental creative energy of the American people is concentrated.

A significant contribution to the understanding of the burning issues of the day, combining profound humanism with brilliant artistic talent, was made by such "key" works of the late sixties as William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), James Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), and Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1969). The many tragic elements in these novels arise not only from their observations of life but from the philosophy of their authors. The bitter childhood memories of Baldwin's autobiographical hero and his depiction of racial oppression; the bloody massacre in Styron's *Meditation on History*; the

lonely soul lost among the horrors of contemporary New York who in Bellow's novel suffers for humanity—all reflect various facets of the national crisis which in our time grips the most powerful country of the bourgeois world.

However as in the past the healthy force of realistic art summons enough strength and talent to oppose the “refined cannibalism” of the present and ward off the threat of spiritual destruction and dissociation that, in the opinion of many critics of American culture, must inevitably afflict humanity. In his novel *Bullet Park* (1969), John Cheever engages in an open battle with destructive, dehumanizing impulses, embodied in the grotesque figure of the fanatical assassin Paul Hammer. Essentially this double of Raskolnikov, cast in the contemporary mould, personifies the reverse side of the petty bourgeoisie whose obedience to the law may quickly give way to the stirrings of petty-bourgeois leftism. Acutely conscious of the disintegration of bourgeois society, and able to aptly criticize it, Hammer—in distinction to Raskolnikov—also acts as a natural, unadulterated, consistent *villain* in the markedly symbolic drama staged in a quiet New York suburb. His attempts to kill poor Tony Nail seem monstrous because the world which Hammer wishes to blow up is too familiar to the reader. Be it ever so unalluring, banal, and tarnished, this world still corresponds to some primordial principle of human nature and society.

Following Cheever in the early seventies, serious American realists concentrate on summarizing and analyzing the emotional and moral experiences accumulated by the country in the preceding “insane” decade. John Updike's *Rabbit Redux* (1971), Joseph Heller's *Something Happened* (1974) and John Gardner's *The Sunlight Dialogues* (1973) deal with a distinct group of problems that occupy the foreground of social life. Gardner, a particularly promising writer who shows an extraordinary concern for social and ethical problems, has introduced many innovations in contemporary American prose. This is true of all his novels, including the recent “contemporary pas-

torale" *Nickel Mountain* (1973). *The Sunlight Dialogues* both analyze recent history and predict the future. Elements of the traditional family history are blended by Gardner with a treatment of the mores and customs of his time. There is also a philosophical dialogue. Here two viewpoints, two conceptions of truth, collide. Sheriff Clamley speaks for the American hoi polloi who follow to some degree the tenets of bourgeois democracy. The troublemaker Sunlight, a wandering philosopher, personifies the rebellious spirit of the so-called "latest trends of thought".

Clamley's struggle with Sunlight and their "dialogues" show the irreversibility of those social and moral shifts which have affected American society. In the end the anarchist Sunlight capitulates. He is not bested by the authorities, although Clamley's argument represents a semi-official stand. Rather he succumbs to an internal, psychological rift, the realization of the inadequacy of his goals and means, his status and pose. While Sunlight turns to the highest impersonal truths, to the gleaming but cold hinterlands of pure reason, the conservative, dull Clamley claims that all humanity, thirsting for peace and well-being, speaks through his lips. Sunlight has broken away from society and begun to hate it, primarily because it can do without him—this is Gardner's judgement of the hero for whom the book is named.

Clamley's speech over Sunlight's grave is more than a rebuke of fruitless, destructive individualism. It is a call for the consolidation of the American spirit through a "general clean-up", renovation, a cleansing of ethics and actions.

The history of the sixties—of revolutions (black, youth, and sexual) and other crises—now occupies the attention of historians, moralists and, naturally enough, men of letters in the United States. But in the latest novels of Cheever, Hersey, Bellow, Updike, Oates, and Gardner, as well as in the work of other writers who form the core of critical realism, one sees something else: a persistent effort to study the lessons of the recent past and

create a system of concepts couched in images which might serve to inspire America as she enters the uncharted regions of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

NOTES

- ¹ *The American Novel Since World War II*, ed. by Marcus Klein, Greenwich, Fawcett, 1969, p. 9.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ³ Van Wyck Brooks, *On Literature Today*, N.Y., Dutton, 1941, pp. 14-15.
- ⁴ J. Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation: a Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars*, N.Y., McGraw-Hill, 1951, p. VIII.
- ⁵ Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*, N.Y., a Signet Book, 1948, pp. 9-10.
- ⁶ J. Aldridge, *The Devil in the Fire, Retrospective Essay on American Literature and Culture 1951-1971*, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1972, p. 77.
- ⁷ *Masses and Mainstream*, N.Y., November, 1955, Vol. 8, No. 11, p. 2.
- ⁸ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, N.Y., Random House, 1964, p. 105.
- ⁹ Bernard Malamud, *The Fixer*, Farrar, N. Y., 1966, p. 335.

M. TUGUSHEVA

THE MOST AMERICAN GENRE*

William Dean Howells' observation that the short story is the favorite genre of American writers holds as true today as it did at the turn of the century. The short story has not been impoverished with the triumphant affirmation of the American novel. It is still a sensitive and operative—perhaps the most operative—genre, though the world around seems to be living by the laws of ever increasing acceleration. Naturally its themes are continually renewed. Romantic short story writers, as a rule, were concerned with abstract but “eternal” concepts: innocence, sin, time, predestination, free will. At the same time the American short story of the nineteenth century maintained a characteristically critical attitude toward social realities. Even romantic allegories at times gave way to a totally realistic depiction of the lives and mores of ordinary people. The main theme in Melville's “Bartleby the Scrivener”, the little man's inability to overcome a lonely life which is as useless as an unclaimed letter, achieved full expression in the literature of the twentieth century.

The comparatively smooth development of capitalism in the country in the past proved a source of illusions on

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the part of most Americans of a harmoniously evolving society. As Engels writes: "For America after all was the ideal of all bourgeois. . . . Here everyone could become, if not a capitalist, at all events an independent man. . . . And because there were not, *as yet*, classes with opposing interests, our—and your—bourgeois thought that America stood *above* class antagonisms and struggles."¹

Such illusions of classlessness and equal opportunity became fully entrenched in society's consciousness from the time of the War of Independence. A certain social idealism became customary. People were confident that America would always develop in its own special way. Reality, the very existence of the undeveloped Western territories with their tremendous economic opportunities for "everyone", seemed to support the nation's illusions. This also engendered the social phenomenon of "American innocence", based on the notion that together with America a new world and a new man were being born, a man whose conscience was unburdened with the sins of the past. It was Adam before the fall, as American critics wrote, primordially and absolutely innocent. This innocence, a fusion of spiritual purity, energy and optimism, was considered an inborn quality of every American as the representative of a young, rising nation. With good reason the image of the "innocent" characteristic of the short story has remained the incarnation of the "true" American.

But American innocence already bore the seeds of the American tragedy. Social idealism, that American Dream nurtured by the enlightening ideas of democracy, reason and progress came into harsh conflict with the reality of the "gilded age". The agonizing and lingering process of eliminating bourgeois-democratic illusions began. In direct proportion to the elimination of these illusions, we find a realistic literature developing, in particular the genre of the short story. The literature of the twentieth century was symbolically inaugurated with Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie*, which dealt a deft blow

to the illusion that success was based on bourgeois respectability and moral steadfastness. In this respect the twentieth century short story did not lag behind the novel in registering the growing disillusionment with a society that did not resemble the ideal fashioned by the bourgeois-democratic imagination.

The American short story has attracted the serious attention of twentieth century critics who actively discuss its genealogy and the particulars of its structure. At times the genre is criticized for its increasing "artificiality". Such reproaches were particularly characteristic for the period dominated by the tales of O. Henry with his masterful technique. In later years, with the debut of Sherwood Anderson and Ring Lardner, the criticism has been heard less frequently.

Gradually the twentieth century short story depends less and less on plot; there is less action and more subtext. The character of its comicality is substantially altered. One finds an increasing element of satire, more of the grotesque and paradoxical, and a tendency to ridicule the bombastic. What at first glance seems ugly and unpleasant suddenly becomes tragic. This is especially characteristic of the stories of Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, and, among contemporary authors, Truman Capote and Carson MacCullers. The grotesque is born of the damage done to the human character by the anomalies of modern "civilization". The phenomenon of violence takes on particular significance. It is seen as the result of social vices and as an inborn propensity. The twentieth century American short story accents the individualistic isolation of people. Love occurs more often than not as the exploitation of one man's feelings by another and becomes, as a rule, a source of unhappiness. The short story seems to verify the poverty of a love which is only adequate to the beggarly philistine spirit. For all practical purposes the happy ending has vanished (here we are not speaking of the magazine love story). The American Adam is still retained as a type, but Adam—that incarnation of American naiveté and enterprise

already reduced by Mark Twain to a peculiar type of "innocent"—changes even more substantially in the works of twentieth century short story writers.

One feature of the contemporary short story is its unusual presentation of material. Although a story may be narrated in the first person, a legacy of folk tradition, it is increasingly more common to eliminate the subjective element and leave out the narrator's personality. Dialogue becomes more important and lends a stage effect to the short story so that it often resembles a small drama, one designed to be "observed" by the reader.

The satirical tale plays a prominent part in contemporary American short story writing. The device of the grotesque is frequently present. Life itself, with its great contradictions, the gap between dream and reality, imagination and everyday life, appearance and essence has turned the American short story writer toward an ironic, grotesque depiction of reality. Such major American literary themes as loneliness, alienation, a violent opposition to outside intrusion, the search for the ideal of a harmonious life are rooted in this discrepancy between desire and reality.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that for at least fifty years, beginning in the nineteen twenties, a major theme of the American short story has been the contradiction between material progress and the moral and spiritual impoverishment of man. The works of many famed masters of the twentieth century short story offer eloquent testimony to this fact.

In the works of Ring Lardner during the twenties, this theme takes on a particularly vivid and original form. Like Mark Twain, Lardner shows the moral and psychological dependence of his hero, a bourgeois of the twenties, on his material surroundings. Utter devotion to the dream of success has removed all vestiges of humanity from Lardner's heroes. Heartless pragmatism breaks the closest ties: "Poor old dad, he died of cancer three years ago, but left enough insurance so that mother and we girls

were well provided for," writes the heroine of the story "Some Like Them Cold" to her proposed bridegroom.

Lardner depicts the traditional hero of American folklore and literature—"the innocent", the Adam—differently from Mark Twain or his own predecessors, the Chicago humorists George Ade and Peter Finley Dunne. In the twentieth century story, beginning with the works of Lardner, the image of the innocent changes substantially. We are no longer dealing with a positive *raisonneur* and respectable citizen such as Dunne's Mr. Dooley. Lardner's "busher" lacks even the slightest notion of moral values and does not perceive himself as a personality and a citizen. He is not capable of considering the common good. Lardner's "bushers" are devoid of any understanding of reality or human nature. Their unhappiness is caused by a state of self-delusion. Lardner, like Twain, derives his comic and satiric effects from the traditional contrast between appearance and essence. But the negative traits of Lardner's characters grow more apparent with each successive story. Such figures as Midge Kelly, the champion, and the producer Conrad Green no longer provoke a smile, but rather a feeling of disgust and bitterness. The comic element is transformed into a kind of conventionality which conceals the repulsive, sometimes tragic import of events, while tragedy is reduced to the level of the everyday.

It is interesting to note how concepts of the tragic and the terrible have evolved in the short story. For Bierce, and still earlier for Poe, horror was generated by something mysterious, nightmarish, otherworldly. For Lardner, Anderson, Hemingway, and Caldwell, horror and tragedy spring from mundane situations. Lardner sees the source of horror in numbed moral feeling, callousness, a banal, everyday existence, the fact that nothing ever happens, that man lives in an unchanging, frozen world.

Hemingway, as opposed to Lardner, continues the tradition of Bierce, introducing an acute sense of the world's fragility and liability to catastrophe.

O. Henry, their predecessor, was no optimist either, but he did feel bound to console the reader and lighten the burdens of his life. As a result, O. Henry created his own special world, a stage where comic, touching little plays were performed, each with a happy ending based on propitious chance. In the works of those writers who debuted in the twenties, chance plays a significant but generally sinister or tragic role. For Hemingway it is violent death, almost a law of nature in its constant threat to man. His early stories are ruled by the irrational will of an evil fate. Here reason is helpless, for the universe submits to one law: the inevitability of death, which "kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially." Hemingway's hero in contrast, say, to J. D. Salinger's, does not strive for knowledge. On the contrary, he usually does not want to think and prefers to remain ignorant. Shaken by the cold merciless resoluteness of killers and the helpless despair of Ole the Swede, Nick Adams remarks: "I can't stand to think about him..." His friend has a ready reply: "'Well, you better not think about it.'" ("The Killers").² People are born with a dream of finding something that can't be lost. But eventually they lose even the smallest thing they possess, and above all else their illusions. The inability to accept and understand reality leads to tragedy; this is the theme of many of the stories of Lardner, Anderson, Hemingway, Salinger, Cheever, and O'Connor. This inability produces illusions, ugly and sometimes ridiculous in the works of Lardner, impassioned in the stories of Anderson, and tragic in the works of Hemingway. We see this in the young Hungarian of "The Revolutionist", a naive young man who, as Italy becomes fascist, concludes that everything is going smoothly and eventually becomes the victim of his own naiveté. But Hemingway's heroes usually part with their illusions early, knowing that at every step a terrible emptiness, death, *nada* awaits a man. Love often serves as a means of fending off fear of *nada*. The love of Robert Jordan and Maria, of Catherine Barkley and Lieutenant Henry is filled

with pity and tenderness. But so often it is doomed by cruelty, because the characters lack the capacity or the desire to understand each other, for no reason at all, just because something is gone ("The End of Something").

Like his predecessors and like those who followed him, Hemingway wrote of the degeneration of the American ideal, of the loss of that former innocence, of a predatory civilization indifferent to man's fate. "Our people went to America," writes Hemingway, "because that was the place to go then. It had been a good country and we had made a bloody mess of it."³ At the same time, gazing on the "green hills of Africa" and thinking of his native America, he affirms that "you could always come back", at least while you could look truth in the eye and fight. Man must and should fight, even if he is doomed. Life can destroy a real man, but it can't beat him.

Comparing Hemingway and Lardner, M. Geismar with some justice remarked that "these two . . . distinguished talents of '20s and in some ways two such distinct talents, should come to an identical agreement".⁴ But the major difference between them, he continues, is that Hemingway wanted to abandon the American ideal when it turned into a nightmare. After the writer's participation in the Spanish Civil War, when it was clear to him what he must fight for, a difficult period began, a lingering crisis where it seemed to him that death was always stronger than life. The sense of man's tragic isolation characteristic of Hemingway's early works remains throughout his career. But he was one of the few writers who openly opposed McCarthyism and conformism. It is also significant that among Hemingway's later heroes there are no egoists. The protagonist of the story "Get a Seeing Eyed Dog" suddenly understands that the meaning of life lies in concern for others, that if in his misery he thinks only of his wife "everything will be all right". Hemingway's "program" of the fifties, teaching concern for one's fellow man, challenged the general mood of isolation and pessimism which characterized the intelligentsia of that period.

Early in his career, Hemingway strives to develop his own style, one that does not resemble stereotyped "metaphoric" prose; he boldly sprinkles his language with folklorisms and conversational speech. Erskine Caldwell, whose favorite genre is the common anecdote colored with everyday speech, goes somewhat further than Hemingway in this respect. In Caldwell's stories which are a direct offshoot of the tall tale, a little crude and at times frivolous, one of the major themes is the deformation and impoverishment of the human spirit in an antagonistic society. Portraying people who are spiritual cripples, moral freaks, he continues the tradition stemming from Biercian dead souls and the innocent automatons of Lardner and Anderson's "grotesques". More in the tradition of Anderson, Caldwell describes how poverty, rather than comfort and affluence, dehumanizes man's spirit, but ownership and cynical egoism are the basic sources of evil and deformity in Caldwell's world. The farmer Lud Moseley is ready to let the farm laborer who has caught his daughter's fancy sit behind bars for twenty years to prevent a *mésalliance*. The butchers, Tom and George, lynch the Negro Will Maxie because they have nothing better to do and because he made too much money.⁵

One may get the impression that the bestiality, baseness and violence of Caldwell's characters is the result of that age-old aggressiveness characteristic of all men. And it is true that Caldwell is pessimistic about human nature. His Tye-Tye is sure that someone played a "mean trick" on them all: "God put us in the bodies of animals and tried to make us act like people."⁶ Caldwell's work also creates a feeling of ever-present catastrophe and irrationality. But he is less inclined than the young Hemingway or some contemporary Southern writers to lay the blame for injustice and evil on man's destructive instincts and "the order of things". Farmer Bolick throws old Abe Lathan out into the street not only because he simply "decided to". Luther Bolick's dull stubbornness hides the calculating sobriety of a man of property who wants to get rid of his older workers and hire healthy young Negroes.

The end of the epoch of prosperity, the depression, and the unemployment of the thirties sharpened the writer's social vision. He began more frequently to turn his attention to people with unsettled lives, seeking and finding seeds of goodness in the human spirit. In the thirties, Caldwell treats the theme of racial discrimination in a new way. He is one of the first American writers to depict a Negro with an awakening sense of dignity. Clam Henry speaks the truth to the stone-hearted miser Arch Gunnard, the collector of dog's tails. Christy Tucker won't allow himself to be beaten. Candy-Man-Beecham prefers death to humiliation.

Caldwell has his own notions of the horrible, finding it in the idiocy of that wretched daily life devoid of the spiritual that drives man to madness, to crime, to outrages against those who are weaker and less able to defend themselves. Caldwell's innocent is sometimes a sly and quick man, but more often he is stupid and stubborn. This innocence frequently proves to be sinister: his "innocents" are dull and ignorant, and spiritually underdeveloped.

Caldwell's favorite satirical devices are the grotesque and the non-sequitur which, in the absurdity of a given situation, reveal its repulsive, often frightening essence. But as a rule even the most tragic of Caldwell's stories are deliberately clothed in an entertaining, passionless form which has led critics to accuse the writer of indifference to those evils that he depicts.

"In much of Faulkner, as in Erskine Caldwell," writes Van Wyck Brooks, "one never knows whether the author feels any compassion for his victims or any real wish that the characters and conditions of these victims might be other than they are."⁷

Caldwell responded on one occasion to this reproach, stating that he was not indifferent, that he loved simple people, was one of them himself, and hated those who looked down on common folks. But like Flannery O'Connor, he condemns vulgarity, ignorance and cruelty wherever he encounters them. It is difficult to read his

story "In the Thick of Folks". The reader finds himself hating the scoundrel to whom the twelve-year-old Perl is sacrificed; but her mother, Cora, who sells her child for a jar of preserves also inspires no sympathy. Caldwell lets us know that evil exists in society as a result of the animal submissiveness of some as well as through the egoistic aggressiveness of others.

As is characteristic of the contemporary short story there are practically no happy endings in Caldwell's tales (although in his novels of the fifties and sixties he often breaks this rule). But one can hardly agree with Carl Boyd's conclusion that because of this Caldwell's work does not merit serious attention. "The slabs of social significance" (fashionable in 1933) are today only a hindrance to the reader, he writes. Caldwell, for Boyd, is "a second Lee Scott". The comparison is based on what seems to Mr. Boyd to be an obligatory dose of sex and violence in Caldwell's writings. While this may appear as an indulgence of philistine bad taste, we should not lose sight of the fact that sex and violence form the only environment where Caldwell's heroes can show their worth. Philistinism, ignorance, and poverty cripple these characters and prevent them from ennobling their instincts. For this reason in Caldwell's works sex rarely gives way to love: true feeling can arise only if a man lives under the normal conditions he deserves.

One can still sense that Caldwell is on the side of social reform today as he was in many respects in the thirties. Characteristically, he is concerned with the educational function of literature, its capacity for accomplishing moral reforms and teaching us how to live better. In the fifties and sixties, similar reformistic tendencies appear in the short stories of J. D. Salinger and Flannery O'Connor.

Salinger wrote his best stories, as well as *The Catcher in the Rye*, during a lamentable era for the American intelligentsia, the late forties and early fifties, when some writers who earlier had been radically oriented abandoned these sympathies and joined in the pursuit of commercial

success. This atmosphere was in our opinion given substantial support by Joseph Wood Krutch in one of his articles, where he holds up the literature of the past as a model for American writers. Here, in his opinion, serenity, peace, and joy predominate. Perhaps, suggests Krutch, the American writer also should choose the golden mean, for happiness and fulfillment most often come to those who conform.

It was precisely at this point that Salinger's short stories appeared, rejecting the credo of the grand, illusory, egoistic "golden mean". Here a major element is the contrast of beauty, dreams, love and spiritual maximalism to all that Holden calls "phony". Man should not abandon high moral ideals and his own dream.

The contradiction between essence and appearance which forms the basis of the bitter irony of his predecessors also attracts Salinger's attention. His finest heroes display a hypersensitive reaction against all that is false. That is why Salinger refuses to accept the pose of the early Hemingway hero who rejects knowledge. Salinger's heroes, on the contrary, meditate intensely on themselves and others, on their environment and their relation to it. For Salinger it is only the "spiritual trampers", as Seymour Glass calls them, the successful philistines, who do not think and do not strive for wisdom.

The stoicism and courage of Hemingway's Lieutenant Henry are merely affectation to the Salingerian hero. Why pretend that things aren't painful? One should scream out in pain so that everyone can hear; this is the way to surmount solitude.

Salinger sees the gap between the actual and the apparent on a rather wide social plane. Not only the individual, but contemporary society as well, lives in a fog of false conceptions regarding its meaning and role in the universe and its unshakeable adherence to a former ideal. Such escapism from the present is manifested in the ordinary man when he attempts to replace reality with an illusion borrowed, for example, from cinema or television. In contrast to such egoistic escapism, Salinger

posits man's moral duty to be fully cognizant of his life and actions.

Salinger's works convey the mood of American youth in the forties and fifties with astounding precision. He observed that quality which sociologist Paul Goodman called the "phenomenon of social immaturity," the desire not to grow up. That is why Salinger consistently sets the world of grownups in opposition to the world of the child with its sincerity, purity, goodness, and lack of concern for self.

If Salinger's characters do not accept reality but categorically reject it, they are just as categorical in their search for what is true, for an opportunity to live with meaning and nobility in the name of a worthy goal. This is already a radical rejection of conformism and alienation. The Glass family cannot imagine existence without human contact and love. For Salinger, as for Hemingway, love is called upon to overcome individualism and alienation. But for Salinger's characters this is a love for mankind rather than for anyone individual. In the fifties, observed the progressive journal *Mainstream*, to contrast coldness, alienation, and conformity with love was tantamount to "a revolutionary act". And that is still one more reason to regret Salinger's long silence. His reclusive life style is a challenge to his own program for a peaceful and beautiful life among men.

John Cheever's unhappy characters share the same dream, but are not granted such a life. Selecting typical specimens of the suburban middle class, Cheever establishes their distinctive feature as fear of life. This fear is born of the sensation of an unstable reality, of irrevocably approaching fatal changes. Times change and so does our scale of values. Mrs. Finnegan asks her lover Pastern not for delicate expensive trinkets but for the key to his private bombshelter, the contemporary paradise, guaranteeing life after death and meaning everything to the Pasterns: their shrine, their club, their home. It is a sign of the times that the shelter is supplied with more than

canned food; it also contains food for the spirit. The bourgeois Mr. Pastern does not scorn art, provided that it consoles and amuses him.

In Cheever's descriptions of the less affluent classes and of the truly poor—the elevator operator, the unsuccessful inventor, the declassé bourgeois for whom a small expenditure is equivalent to ruin—the tragic image of the big city with its broken hopes and unheard cries for help and sympathy comes to the foreground. The bitter irony of it all is that unfortunates like Ralph and Lora in "The Pot of Gold" devoutly believe in the romanticism and magic of big business and are certain that they too will succeed. Somehow they resemble O. Henry's characters, although there is nothing idyllic about their lives. For Cheever is distressed to see people relying so thoughtlessly on success and is sceptical about the mythical, a regular, auspicious chance that so often comes to the aid of O. Henry's unfortunates, due particularly to the fact that even those who have achieved success face the ever-present danger that their affluent, comfortable life will come crashing down and be transformed into a semi-impoverished existence. Fate for Cheever takes on the aspect of Fortuna, the capricious, unreliable goddess of wealth who can suddenly withdraw her favors and then. . . . Mr. Pastern will go bankrupt, his home and property, with its personal bombshelter, falling into the hands of those who had better luck.

The symbolism of Cheever's stories is often transparent. If the poor can only give their children a balloon and a lollipop, Cheever's grownups just as often receive only the balloons of empty hopes and the lollipops of sweet promises that cannot be fulfilled. Often Cheever's hero acknowledges the full bitterness and depth of his rejection of modern life only when he has reached the pinnacle of success, "the highest point in the arc of a bridge". Then the bourgeois Adam finds the civilization which he himself has created repugnant and begins to lament his lost paradise, that "simple, clear world". The hero of the story "The Angel of the Bridge" imagines para-

dise to be a quiet, provincial town which his predecessors once left, heading for the broad expanses to make lots of money, as Hemingway observed once. In his best stories, Cheever sums up the life of those Adams who bemoan their former innocence: "My life was over, and it would never come back, everything that I loved—blue sky courage, lustiness, the natural grasp of things. It would never come back. I would end up in the psychiatric ward of the country hospital, screaming that the bridges, all the bridges in the world, were falling down."⁸

The personality of a Cheeverian hero is oddly unstable and this could hardly be otherwise, for in his eyes the boundary between illusion and reality is also vague and unstable. Common sense and sober reason are lost for both Victor MacKenzie ("The Children") and for the swimmer (in the story by that name) whose Mississippi is the chlorinated water of other people's swimming pools. But if this human "fog" ever guesses the true state of things, he nevertheless stubbornly sticks to his illusory notion of himself and his life, having mastered the ability to hide unpleasant truths from himself. In addition, Adam's business instincts have changed. Victor MacKenzie uses his to humor the evil Mr. Hoserly. This descendant of pioneers has become a lifelong house guest, a parasite on those who have succeeded.

For Cheever, as for Hemingway, fate and the absurd, "that darkness that lies at the heart of life", play a significant role in the existence of his characters. But while Hemingway meets fate with the ignorance of courage, Cheever leans more toward the rules of fair play. Often lamentable metamorphoses occur in his characters when they violate the code of moral obligations decreed for man from on high. But still the writer defends values which are real for the man of today rather than abstract commandments or lifeless dogma; above all else he stresses the need to overcome egoism and indifference to one's fellows. A man fails to help someone and this sin results in his own demise, the destruction of his personality. People thoughtlessly break ties with others. A silly disagree-

ment destroys the harmony of a family ("Seaside Houses"). In the same story the writer affirms that one cannot be happy without thinking of the happiness of others; one cannot disown the misery of one's fellows and watch indifferently as "bonds thaw and dissolve like ice in a cocktail".

Like Salinger, Cheever creates the impression that beauty is indestructible. This is the result of his realization that contemporary existence is not the same as existence *per se*. In the most difficult moments Cheever's hero believes in "... Valor! Love! Virtue! Compassion! Splendor! Kindness! Wisdom! Beauty!"⁹ And although the poor fellow in the story "Ocean" who scrawls the word "love" in every possible place does not succeed in bringing love back to his home, nevertheless true love, faithful and selfless, exists in the universe and the writer pins his hopes for humanity on it.

One might draw the conclusion that Cheever's irony simply dissolves into lyricism and sentimentality, that the initial, Lardneresque principle in his short stories gives way to O. Henryism. Indeed, sometimes it does seem that the writer has yielded to the temptation of "positive thinking" and does not say all that he might. Nevertheless the satirist in him is too powerful to give way to the comforter. In this respect he resembles Flannery O'Connor, who found it difficult at times to reconcile harsh Catholic dogmatism with the inquisitive integrity and scepticism of the realist. O'Connor's criticism of contemporary society's "guarantee of success" is often clothed in religious trappings and complicated by allegory and symbolism. Still it remains criticism. O'Connor's submission to Catholicism and her penchant for realism coexist amiably only to a certain point. Often the realistic approach manages to break loose from the Procrustean bed of dogma. Many of her stories condemn both the "cold" power of science and a religion that fetters the human soul, not stopping at violence to impose its spiritual yoke. Such a contradictory position and a victory over dogma are evident in her best stories: "A Good Man is Hard to

Find", "The Good Country People", and "The Displaced Person".

It is true that in O'Connor's short stories there are always many levels of meaning. The first level is generally obvious; it is the main conflict. In "The Good Country People" this is the clash between Hulga Hopewell and the alleged Bible salesman. The tragic paradox of Hulga's life is that she, a Ph. D., knows nothing of the world about her or the people around and is bitterly deceived in her initial encounter with this world. The salesman-imposter pronounces the final verdict of spiritual blindness. Thus Flannery O'Connor equates intellectual arrogance with extreme ignorance and spiritual insensibility. Hulga cannot complain; her own disbelief, vulgarly and primitively duplicated, turns against her. But this is only the first level. Objectively speaking, the unusual grotesque situation of the story is not devoid of that spirit of doubt which O'Connor so fears. The "punishment" of Hulga, a woman deformed in her youth, does not fit her "crime" which but involves the attempt of a lonely, unhappy woman to seek consolation in knowledge rather than faith and hope. O'Connor is opposed not so much to the "devil of the educationalism" as to indifference and self-satisfaction, the superficial optimism of the philistines and people of property. O'Connor reacts with repugnance and horror not only to the imposter who claims to be selling Bibles, but to Mrs. Freeman, a typical specimen of a "good" philistine. O'Connor's attitude toward her is one of cold, restrained and insurmountable hatred. The name Freeman is not without symbolism. Flannery O'Connor, like Ring Lardner, uses the name to parody the myth of the ideal American of the past, of the young free land pushing West. Now he is a successful citizen insensitive to good, a heartless, captive spirit.

The outstanding story "The Displaced Person" offers clear evidence that the realistic half of O'Connor's talent has decisively gained the upper hand.

Even here there are elements of Catholic symbolism, so characteristic for O'Connor, the theme of the messiah and

revelation. But what we find is false prophecy and a false prophetess. Mrs. Shortley, cruel, ignorant, looking but not seeing, hates displaced persons because they are different. She has resolved not to give up one jot of her religious or her American electedness to the "backward" strangers. O'Connor's realism dominates here as the author reveals the connection between Mrs. Shortley's religious intolerance and her exclusively egoistic proprietary instincts; for even her visions are the incarnation of malicious philistine instincts. The tale wins the reader over by its astounding veracity. Even the ending is unusual for O'Connor, for the death of the Polish worker Guizac, which shakes his employer, does not lead to her rebirth. Having lost her farm she strives with the same tenacity and egoism to guard the last of her capital—her declining health—for it is *hers*.

The stories of Flannery O'Connor are contemporary in their themes. She, like other major American writers, deals with the growing individualistic isolation of people, the deformation and destruction of emotional bonds, the limitations of egoism, the fatality of egotistic success. At the same time she is traditional, like the talented Joyce Carol Oates who once said in an interview that she could not imagine literature without the development of traditions. Incidentally, the favorite writer of both women is Nathaniel Hawthorne. He is close to O'Connor in the sense that he loves to depict man in improbable situations, committing unthinkable, eccentric deeds, and in the sense that he prefers the grotesque. Both Oates and Hawthorne constantly sense the transparency and irreality of the world around them, one's helplessness in the face of life's vortices; both experience a feeling of doom, the fear of falling into the abyss of evil and self-destruction which threatens every man. Oates' heroes, like Hawthorne's, have a thirst for life and self-realization strangely coupled with an icy insensibility that makes one feel, as Hawthorne put it, that the heart is a piece of fog.

Oates' obsessive, persistent motif of "duality" in which

a man's double turns out to be his own reflection is also reminiscent of Hawthorne. One cannot but recall Hawthorne's description of a mirror as a door into the world of spirit. Almost every one of Oates' characters looks at his reflection sooner or later, trying to find here the answer to the eternal question: Who am I?

The theme of the reflection has tragic undertones for Oates because a man's double in this world is his own penchant for evil, because he never knows what he is capable of and this is dangerous and terrible—for the man himself and for those around him. While Oates' work at times seems to be an agonized confession by contemporary man, as opposed to Hawthorne and O'Connor, she does not consider original sin to be the source of all evil. The evil that lives in his soul and unexpectedly reveals itself is a "reflection" of a great, independently existing social evil which stems from the very structure of society. Casting its shadow over modern man, it moulds him according to its inhuman laws. It may be deciphered as poverty, restlessness, loneliness, the legacy of broken promises of the prosperity which was "ordained" already in the eighteenth century for each and every man. Such battered hopes lie at the source of dissatisfaction, hatred, alienation, outbursts of violence and the desecration of human dignity. Such social deception, in her opinion, unfailingly brings retribution.

Oates' best stories (and there are many of them) force us to ponder the reasons for social misfortune. At times, the authoress argues with Hawthorne's preconception of the permanence of evil. This is reflected to some extent in the composition of her collection *By the North Gates*, where the terrible, cheerless tale of evil's triumph over goodness ("Swamp") is balanced by the last story, whose name the collection bears. The protagonist, a lonely old man whose only friend—a dog—is cruelly killed by teenagers (and he himself may be their next victim) cries out in an imaginary confrontation with the young killers: "You come back! Come back here! All my life I done battle against it: that life don't mean nothin'!

That it don't make sense! Sixty-eight years of a battle, so you come back! You listen to me! You ain't goin' to change my mind now, an' me grown so old an' come so far. . . ."10

These two stories seem to be the antipodes of Joyce Carol Oates' world with all others falling between them. Almost all of them deal with cruelty of one sort or another. This may be pointless impersonal cruelty as in the case of the boys who kill a filling station attendant for four dollars and then a fourteen-year-old girl for a few cents.

Human life has no value for them. No one has taught them how to love and respect others. They value only money, the source of the good life, of food and entertainment ("Boys at a Picnic").

Most often the authoress is frightened by the younger generation of Americans. But she is also able to see the social protest in their rebellion against the established way of life and against the ideas of their parents, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she is able to show its social conditionality. Life is such that it forces one to disobey the law, while the inner laws of conscience, honor and nobility are not strict enough, not incontestable enough to prevent a youth from breaking them. Having committed a crime, he is condemned to punishment. The only legacy he leaves is a cigarette butt, a terrible symbol of his superfluity, of a life wasted to no purpose.

The story "The Death of Mrs. Sheer" in the collection *Upon the Sweeping Flood* is Caldwellian in its vivid grotesque depiction of a deadening, bestial, inhuman existence. True, the protagonists—the murderer Jeremiah and his illegitimate son Taffy—appear to be abnormal, but by deftly stressing their selfishness and moral insensitivity, the authoress makes these images indicate that the time is out of joint, and the madness of the world produces such "dregs", such "innocents" who don't know what they are doing. Like other contemporary short story writers, Oates debunks the traditional "innocent" as port-

rayed in the genre throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

"The Man That Turned into a Statue" also deserves attention. Here is the antithesis of the ancient Greek myth of Pygmalion and Galatea where man's love turned stone to flesh. In Oates' story hostility and bad luck turn the hero into a "statue". Driven by fate and men he resorts to a knife. His terrible deeds snowball; it seems to him that someone else is killing his victims. After finishing the dinner of the family he has murdered, he and his female companion take off for Canada in their victims' old car to begin a new life. In many ways this story is typical for Joyce Carol Oates. Here are the themes of duality, of unjust fate, of evil fortune which divides people into prosperous philistines and homeless wanderers, of an indifferent system which makes men cruel and indifferent.

Other stories of interest are: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?", "Shame", "Accomplished Desires", "Wild Saturday", "How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Correction and Began My Life Over Again", "Four Summers", "Boy and Girl", "The Heavy Sorrows of the Body", and "You". Each has its share of truth and penetration into the human psyche. Many deal with youth, depicting the life and mores of suburban teenagers: the Suburbia of private homes, expensive cars, private schools, and the constant threat of insanity.

"You" is a masterly tale of a Hollywood star who so identifies with her double, the reflection created by the media and by mass adulation of a sex bomb, that she no longer responds to genuine human emotion and coldly drives one of her daughters to suicide. In "The Heavy Sorrows of the Body" one can occasionally discern motifs reminiscent of O. Henry, as in Oates' descriptions of lodgers in furnished rooms engaged in a lonely struggle with the enormous, unapproachable world around them. There has been a curious change in such characters, however, since the turn of the century. This transformation itself

reflects substantial changes in the life of the contemporary American city.

Many of Oates' stories recall the stories of Lardner and Cheever, both thematically and stylistically. Here we find the same picture of the contradiction between material abundance and terrible spiritual disorder and misfortune.

Joyce Carol Oates has developed a type of grotesque that is curiously her own. As a rule this is the "reflection" of a deformed reality. Humor does not enter into the grotesque here as it does in Caldwell. Terror and laughter are incompatible for Oates. On the other hand, the authoress does not seek out the pathetic in deformity as is often the case in Truman Capote's stories. Oates' objectivity is that of a witness who arranges the facts and evidence in such a way that the reader frequently brings in a just verdict.

Even a brief, partial survey of the twentieth century American short story shows that satire and the spirit of criticism, often in conjunction with a tragic view of the universe, are now characteristic for this genre. Despite widespread opinion to the contrary, these qualities do not in the slightest degree detract from the artistic merits of the genre. As early as 1907 in *The Short Story: Its Principles and Structure* E. M. Albright stressed that the short story could not gain general permanent recognition if characterized by despair and pessimism; it must, she said, depict reality in a healthy or at any rate harmless light. A similar viewpoint underlies the tendency to contrast the twentieth century short story to its nineteenth century counterpart and, in fact, to question the worth of its realistic content and social criticism. There are many who feel that the short story should not deal with significant political or ethical problems. In *The Modest Art* T. O. Beachcroft says that the short story should not be a sermon. In support of this thesis he cites H. E. Bates who considers the short story "a poetic form", but "no vehicle for messages". Beachcroft writes: "The social or documentary content of the day seems of less importance,

compared with the deeper insights that short story writers have achieved in the past.”¹¹

However, one can hardly underestimate the importance of the social—and, above all, satirical aspects of the contemporary short story. Beachcroft himself finds that the contemporary socio-political life of the West and the spiritual atmosphere it engenders provide excellent conditions for the development of literary satire in general and for the development of a sarcastic, farcical short story in particular. J. Beer also testifies to the growing irony and scepticism of American humor, and indeed, the essence of the contemporary American short story lies in its unrelenting satire.

The American short story of the twenties shattered the illusions of the jazz age, revealing spiritual poverty and anti-democratic feelings in an epoch of prosperity, and disclosed the seamy side of industrial progress. Egoism, greed, alienation, and spiritual degeneration continue to be exposed by these merciless commentators—the American short story writers. They are sensitive to the growing absurdity of the individualistic life. But, most importantly, their satirical interpretations of reality, as we see it, stems from an “ideal of higher morality”, as the Russian revolutionary democrat Dobrolyubov would say, from a dream of harmonious, brotherly, selfless relations among men.

NOTES

- ¹ Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 371.
- ² E. Hemingway, *The Novels*, N.Y., 1944, p. 519.
- ³ E. Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*, N.Y., 1935, p. 285.
- ⁴ M. Geismar, *Writers in Crisis*, 1942, pp. 74-79.
- ⁵ E. Caldwell, “Saturday Afternoon”, in *Stories*, N.Y., 1944, p. 242.
- ⁶ E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*, The Modern Library, N. Y., p. 298.
- ⁷ Van Wyck Brooks, *The Writer in America*, N.Y., 1964, p. 161.
- ⁸ John Sheever, “The Angel of the Bridge”, in *The Brigadier and the Golf Widow and Other Stories*, N.Y., 1964, p. 34.
- ⁹ John Cheever, “A Vision of the World” op. cit., p. 247.
- ¹⁰ Joyce Carol Oates, *By the North Gates*, N.Y., 1971, p. 206.
- ¹¹ T. O. Beachcroft, *The Angel of the Bridge*, pp. 215-16.

M. KORENEVA

EUGENE O'NEILL AND THE TRADITIONS OF AMERICAN DRAMA*

In contrast to poetry and prose, which have several hundred years' experience, American dramaturgy is very young indeed. It is entirely a child of the twentieth century, although the first dramatic works appeared in the New World at the end of the eighteenth century. One can precisely date the birth of American drama: July 28, 1916. This is the date when the amateur Provincetown Players gave the first public performance of Eugene O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff*.

Is one justified after only six decades have passed in speaking of national traditions? Are we not running ahead of ourselves when we call elements of succession that have hardly appeared "tradition"? Let us recall the lament of Henry James at the absence of deep roots and traditions formed in the distant past, although at the time American literature had already witnessed a fruitful romantic tradition (and indeed an epoch of Enlightenment) and its colossi, such as Melville and Whitman, had written their finest works.

While serving as a warning to avoid over-hasty conclusions, James' example prompts us to more attentively examine the facts of literary history in order to approach

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an understanding of insufficiently studied factors which create a tradition rather than to put off examining this issue until a time when that tradition will have acquired conclusive, clear outlines.

The justification of such an approach is shown by still another factor: the unusually rapid development of American dramaturgy. Indeed, different prosaic and poetic genres developed in different ways, taking form gradually, beginning with the humble compositions of the first settlers: travel notes, sermons, theological and political treatises, fiery political speeches, songs, jokes and satirical verses. These became better and richer until they acquired their own voice.

American dramaturgy never had the chance to develop gradually with grace. Because of its peculiar development, it could not accumulate artistic treasures; beginning from scratch it immediately set out on an independent path without essentially experiencing a long period of development. In connection with this, it would not be out of place to recall the words of a modern American critic who, responding to the publication of a collection of plays written before the works of O'Neill and until recently considered irrevocably lost, observed that it would have been better had they remained lost.

One man caused the great revolution that led to the birth of American drama: Eugene O'Neill. One cannot overestimate his contribution to American drama no matter what one may say about his individual plays. His role in the history of American drama is so great because his work reveals many laws of its development.

By the twenties American literature had reached a level where it could be compared to European literature without condescending reference to its newness. In its womb masterworks had ripened which would bring it in the period between two world wars into the ranks of the finest literatures in the West. The creation of a national dramaturgy was a part of this flowering of American literature and the new artistic perspectives that had opened before it. Naturally this made the position of the new-

born dramaturgy extremely complex presenting demands and tasks of which only highly developed literary forms were capable. It was able to more or less deal with these difficulties as is evidenced by the production of American plays abroad in the twenties and thirties, that is in the first and second decades of its existence. One must first name Eugene O'Neill, then Elmer Rice, and then Clifford Odets, Irwin Shaw, and Lillian Hellman. Their plays were popular in Europe when earlier one would hardly hear mention of even one American play.

Still the difficulties that confronted American drama in the early days of its development were not limited to this. Its fate was determined not so much by the height of the general literary level which only encouraged drama to strive for the summits of art, as the absence of a single artistic system, the sort which despite all individual differences with regard to individual writers and concrete works is evident in romanticism or in the critical realism of the nineteenth century. Such a system could have served to support the genre which was only beginning to take form within the framework of American literature, just as romanticism stimulated prose and poetry in the United States in the last century.

The tens and twenties as an artistic period were characterized by a variety of artistic trends never before witnessed and perhaps never again to be observed. Realism, which in its attempt to grasp and express the truth of contemporary reality relied on a great classical heritage—on the works of Stendahl, Balzac, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov, was accompanied and at times overwhelmed and silenced by futurism, expressionism, imagism, dadaism and surrealism—and these are only the main trends. One could also add symbolism to the list; for to the end of the twenties this movement had not lost its influence, particularly in drama. Some of these movements were decadent and frankly destructive in their relation to art as well as anti-humanist by nature. Others wanted to find the most adequate means to

express the spirit of an epoch of general crisis whose final product and personification was the First World War.

Many of these trends would have only a brief existence. Many were unable to create significant works of art or to leave a noticeable imprint on the artistic life of the time. Many, caught up in the frenzied chase of novelty, dissolved into other trends and were never able to take on a tangible form. Now, some fifty or sixty years hence, we can say that the claims to the new artistic discovery of the world which each such movement made in turn often did not correspond to their actual creations and the only thing of interest frequently proved to be their manifestos and declarations which militantly decry the achievements of their predecessors and call them hopelessly antiquated.

These trends did not have the universality of realism not only in the totality of their grasp and comprehension of reality, but in their applicability to all types of art. Some of these trends had a certain artistic originality. Some of the successful, if not optimal, forms were for expressionism—poetry, drama and painting; for symbolism—poetry and drama; for cubism—painting, etc. The best work done by advocates of these methods belongs to these spheres.

We are obliged to dwell on this question because at the beginning of his career, O'Neill, and in his person all of American dramaturgy, found himself in the thick of tense aesthetic disputes. It would seem that this situation was reminiscent of the motley artistic panorama and declarations that realism was doomed by the appearance of each newborn modernistic school, manifested at the time in the literature and art of other Western countries. Nevertheless the situation was in principle totally different. Behind the quests of Maeterlinck and Verhaeren stood the traditions of the medieval, folk theatre of Belgium. Behind the strangest cubist or surrealist canvases of Picasso were the traditions of Goya and Velazquez which continued to live in his works. Behind the experiments of Sean O'Casey—the continuation of quests for a form of

national art begun in the plays of Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge, born in the process of the formation of Ireland's national self-consciousness. America's theatrical yesterday would give nothing but negative values to O'Neill: things which had to be destroyed and overcome once and for all. This above all applied to the two "giants" on which American commercial theatre relied (Broadway was flourishing long before American dramaturgy was born)—drawing-room comedy and melodrama; these, by preventing the slightest breath of life from reaching the stage, fulfilled the needs of the bourgeois public.

Entering the struggle for a national theatre where he, in his own words, wanted to "be an artist or nothing",¹ O'Neill took reality as a point of departure, creating the foundations of American dramaturgy as a realistic dramaturgy. He first gave it a true sense of reality without which the dream of creating a national theatre would have been an empty, idle amusement.

Following *Bound East for Cardiff*, O'Neill's sea plays—*The Long Voyage Home* and *The Moon of the Caribbees*—introduced the public to the crude speech of sailors, cruel skirmishes and throatcutting which in other circumstances might have sounded like a passive recording of facts but here took on the power of an artistic document. O'Neill was not afraid to depict things that were considered "base".

With time, O'Neill's artistic world grew more complex; his vision took on the philosophical depth which his first sea plays lack; but the bond with life, living reality, that O'Neill retained in all his work, redeemed his greatest artistic works. Without exaggeration one can say that the playwright set himself the goal of studying the real contradictions and conflicts of American reality; the closer he examined it, the more evident its inner enmity to man became. O'Neill's dramaturgy passionately rejects this reality based on social and racial injustice, on man's deprivation of work, on the race for material well-being and the consignment of spiritual values to oblivion that corrupt the individual and society, on the hostility of bour-

geois society to art and to any form of creation. O'Neill incarnated all of these conflicts in his plays which are penetrated now with ironic mockery, now with the sense of profound tragedy. In the work of O'Neill's younger peers and successors—Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, Paul Green, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee—one notes that the problems they tackle are based to a significant degree on that which was first discovered and given life on the stage by the efforts of O'Neill. What is particularly important, this approach determined the success both of those works which undoubtedly belong to the realm of realistic theatre (*Desire Under the Elms* or the plays of the Tyrone cycle) and of those where characteristic expressionistic devices play an important part (*The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*).

This orientation on life rather than on speculative ideas, and on a complex, many-faceted reality is the distinction and strength of American dramaturgy to this day. But O'Neill's aesthetics was not tied to one specific form of drama. If we consider his great legacy—he wrote some sixty plays—we will notice, upon close examination, an astonishing fact. There is no one play whose form can be called typical of O'Neill's theatre. We know the form of Chekhov's plays, the form of Ibsen's plays in his middle or late period, the early (*Miss Julie*, *The Father*) and late (*To Damascus*, *Dream Play*) plays of Strindberg; despite the concrete plot, collisions and images of the characters, one can find a characteristic manner of resolving conflict expressed in the structure of the works of each of these playwrights.

Nothing of the sort can be said of O'Neill. We cannot even find forms which he prefers. The closer one's acquaintance with his work, the more one senses that he found it extraordinarily easy to reject successful resolutions and, as though testing fate, set out in search of new forms which often resulted in creative failures.

Inevitably we ask: what is the cause of this strange phenomenon? Was it not dictated by an aesthetic blind-

ness that prevented the playwright from distinguishing genuine values or by subordination to fashions that denied today things that were exalted yesterday?

I think we must seek the answer elsewhere: in the exclusiveness of O'Neill's position in the American theatre and in the absence of old, varied traditions which he tried to replace by his own titanic efforts. It goes without saying that here he was influenced by contemporary European drama with its varied artistic forms. A significant part in the formation of O'Neill's dramatic method was played by the work of Chekhov, Gorky and Ibsen. But his influences were not restricted to contemporary artistic phenomena or works of his immediate predecessors. O'Neill sought the most adequate forms for the incarnation of his tragic vision and therefore consciously turned to the epoch of the flowering of tragedy. He was particularly inspired by ancient tragedy with its severe simplicity and monumental form. The diverse forms and genres of the contemporary European theatre made striving for a similar diversity almost an obligation. But in his experiments (and let us not forget that the concept of "experiment" for O'Neill and for all of American drama of the time included on an equal basis with forms of avantgarde theatre forms of realistic theatre), O'Neill never allowed himself to be led by literary fashions. What is more, he often neglected the current movements, irritating the public and the critics with his refusal to go in the direction he was expected to. One example is his fascination with masks (*The Great God Brown*, *Lazarus Laughed*) which had nothing in common with the then current fascination with primitive African art and essentially has no analogy in modern theatre.

What criteria guided him, then, in his choice of dramatic forms? His only criterion was that the structure of a play suited its material. One of the most valuable testaments to this may be found in his notes and in excerpts from his writer's diary published in 1931 in connection with the production of the play *Mourning Becomes Electra*; these trace the development of his dramatic concep-

tion from the moment of its birth to its final realization. Here O'Neill first also conceived of and resolved to use masks, as well as the *a parte* technique, worked out in *Strange Interlude*; but as his conception was developed, he noticed that it increasingly led to contradictions with the material of the play and so rejected these techniques.

Let us compare O'Neill's diary entries of March 27 and September 21, 1930. After reading the first variant of his tragedy, the playwright wrote:

"...use every means to gain added depth and scope—can always cut what is unnecessary afterwards—will write second draft using half masks and an *Interlude* technique (combination *Lazarus* and *Interlude*) and see what can be gotten out of that—think these will aid me to get just the right effect—must get more distance and perspective—more sense of fate—more sense of the unreal behind what we call reality which is the real reality!—The unrealistic truth wearing the mask of lying reality, that is the right feeling for this trilogy, if I can only catch it!"²

On September 21, 1930, after numerous reworkings and corrections he writes:

"...learned a lot—stylized solil. uncovered new insights into characters and recurrent themes—job now is to get all this naturally in straight dialogue—as simple and direct and dynamic as possible—with as few words—stop doing things to these characters—let them reveal themselves. . . .

"Keep mask conception—but as Mannon *background*, not foreground!—what I want from this mask concept is a dramatic arresting visual symbol of separateness, the fated isolation of this family, the mark of their fate which makes them dramatically distinct from the rest of world—I see now how to retain this effect without the use of built masks—by make-up—in *repose* (that is background) the Mannon faces are like life-like death masks—(death-in-life motive, return to death-with-peace yearning that runs through plays). . . ."³

Not the a priori choice of forms and subsequent viewing of material through them, but, on the contrary, the definition of form as the best incarnation of the material is one of the basic principles of O'Neill's dramaturgy. Several types of realistic plays, several types of plays using forms of avantgarde theatre, the philosophical fable (*The Iceman Cometh*) and the philosophical fable in the form of a satirical tale (*Marco Millions*)—such is the range of the creative possibilities of this playwright in whose footsteps the new generation followed.

All major American playwrights, with the exception of Tennessee Williams, employ the same diversity of dramatic forms. *Death of a Salesman*, *All My Sons*, *The Crucible*, and *Incident at Vichy* so differ formally that in this respect they might have been written by different people.

In an interview, Arthur Miller said, "I don't think one can repeat old forms as such, because they express most densely a moment of time. For example I couldn't write a play like *Death of a Salesman* any more. I couldn't really write any of my plays now. Each is different, spaced sometimes two years apart, because each moment called for a different vocabulary and a different organization of material."⁴

Edward Albee might calmly ascribe to this, since out of the ten or so plays written by him only *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Delicate Balance* have similar structures.

The approach to a play's form through the inner needs of the material demands extraordinary sensitivity from a playwright, not only in the discernment of these needs, but with regard to the style that changes each time in accordance with them. The results of this encounter are unexpected, and at times give little comfort to the author, as was the case with *The Great God Brown* or *Days Without End*, but the wealth of dramatic forms of the contemporary American theatre is well worth the price of individual failures and is a vital stimulus to the development of American drama.

It would be valuable to discuss the devices of experimental theatre in some detail because the correlation of principles of experimental theatre with those of realistic theatre remains one of the cardinal problems with regard to dramatic form. The use of avantgarde theatrical forms, largely forms of expressionistic theatre in the twenties which, apart from realism, was the most ideologically active and artistically integrated trend in world dramaturgy: gaps in the action, shifting of temporal levels, depiction of things happening in the consciousness as a second reality of equal significance to the objective, material world, the violation of logical continuity, etc. are all evident in such plays as *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*.

Critics have long ago discovered and confirmed both these general principles and analogies and parallels in constructions and in individual elements of the development of the plot and conflict in these plays by O'Neill and in the works of the German expressionists, in particular Georg Kaiser's *From Morning to Midnight* and *The Coral* and in his trilogy *Gas*.

On the other hand, O'Neill himself repeatedly denied any expressionist influence and insisted that his artistic vision was utterly independent. In the quarrel that arose between the playwright and his critics, the latter invariably won—and not without reasons: for the analogies and parallels were indeed present. Only in recent works does one sense a wish to listen to O'Neill himself. Thus H. Frenz, in his work *Eugene O'Neill*, notes not only similarities but differences between *Gas* and *The Hairy Ape*, and still, this is insufficient to demonstrate the divergence in both playwrights' dramatic methods.

"As has been pointed out, O'Neill was familiar with Kaiser's plays, but whether the similarities are accidental or not, the two writers were dealing with quite different problems. Yank, the central character in *The Hairy Ape* (like Reuben Light in the later *Dynamo*), is not a victim of the machine like the factory hands in *Gas*. He is not a representative of the working class; he stands for man

who in losing his relationship to God has lost his sense of belonging.”⁵

It seems to me that his observation of the different problems dealt with by Kaiser and O'Neill does not correctly resolve the question. To do this, one must examine the basic distinctive features of expressionism itself, its style. One such feature was a conscious rejection of the depiction of reality, or to use the words of the American scholar U. Weisstein, “in order to qualify as a bona fide expressionist an artist must reject the mimetic approach”.⁶ As a result of his rejection of the mimetic approach, the artist rejects individuality and also psychology. Striving to express the inner essence of all objects, the laws of the world around it, expressionism reduced the classical formula “typical characters in typical situations” to a concept of “type”. Man, with his unique individuality, is beyond the perspective of expressionist art. This is precisely what made the method unacceptable to O'Neill, who writes, “Expressionism denies the value of characterization. As I understand it, expressionism tries to minimize everything on the stage that stands between the author and the audience. It strives to get the author talking directly to the audience. (...) I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters. When it sees ‘A Man’ and ‘A Woman’—just abstractions, it loses human contact by which it identifies itself with the protagonist of the play. (...) I do not believe that the character gets between the author’s idea and the audience”.⁷

The central figure in O'Neill’s dramaturgy is man, with his unique inner world. In *The Emperor Jones*, for example, the protagonist wandering all night through the jungle in hopes of escaping the vengeance of his rebellious subjects is not an image of an abstract consciousness agonizing in fear of death and passing through several stages of disintegration; “the ladder-like nature” of emotional shifts replacing the continuous internal development of characters in realism was one of the characteristic features of expressionism. But at the same time

it is not a collective image of "the Negro", a victim of social injustice, although these are both important factors in the characterization. This is the image of a living man, Brutus Marcus Jones, formerly a conductor in a Pullman car with the life of a murdered friend that he took during a card game on his conscience: a man who has passed through prison and hard labor; a keenwitted, clever, brave man who is sufficiently ambitious to strive for power and self-confident enough not to notice that his power is tottering; a man with humor, a good-natured man who nevertheless fleeces the meek, ignorant people of an island in hopes of somehow saving up enough money and freeing himself. He secretly nurses a dream of freedom but causes suffering and profoundly suffers himself; he realizes that money is the main motivation of the life of a bourgeois society and believes in the power of charms, believes that he can be felled only by a charmed silver bullet. In a word, this is a man who has so many well-developed traits and motives that only realism could reveal them. Because of that image, the play's hero takes on a genuinely tragic resonance. Realism answered the creative goals of O'Neill above all because it allowed him to incarnate the insolubility of the conflict between the individual and a world hostile to him, bourgeois America. It creates the illusion of cloudless flowering and equal opportunities for all, an illusion which is shattered against the rock of reality and leads to the death of those who try to realize it.

Symbolism, expressionism and other forms of avant-garde theatre showed a world reduced to a prefixed and in principle inflexible formula. The schematization entailed by the unequivocal resolution of the conflicts of personality and society—devoid of both historicity and of a profound penetration into the human psyche—was unacceptable for O'Neill.

It is therefore obvious that O'Neill's borrowing of expressionist devices was not an indiscriminate transference of ready images onto American soil, or a blind attempt to copy foreign experiments. In their application

to American reality, devices discovered by the experimental theatre took on another meaning. Introduced into a new, realistic artistic system, they were embodied in the constructive principles of plays, changing the style of the work but not undermining its realistic foundations, incarnated above all in the characters. The innovativeness of O'Neill's dramaturgy was determined by this union of essentially different artistic systems; in this dramaturgy, the leading part was played by the character constructed according to the laws of realistic theatre, while the role of intensification and activization of that character's revelation and the strengthening of the dynamics of its exposition belonged to the means and devices of experimental theatre. Thus O'Neill created his own "unconventional" conventional theatre.

The special function of character in the structure of the drama bequeathed by O'Neill to his successors became one of the distinctive features of American dramaturgy.

This is evident in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Devices of the experimental theatre more complex than those of O'Neill's day intersect in an extraordinary complex system; for this reason, the play imperceptibly departs from the real world and enters into the past or the world of fantasy. This, however, does not interfere with the realistic foundations of the drama: the images of Willie, his wife and their sons. The dramaturgy of expressionism never attained the staggering force incarnate in Miller's heroes, the conviction of human passions, or the almost inhuman attempts to break free of the power of circumstances.

Under other historical conditions and at the juncture of other artistic systems this occurred again during the sixties in the work of Edward Albee. In many respects, Albee's philosophy is close to that of playwrights connected with the theatre of the absurd. His plays often exhibit motives characteristic of this sort of theatre: the tragic estrangement of people, their inability to communicate, the futility of opposing evil as a primary, eternal condition of existence, and the absurdity of human

existence. But this is their common material; their approach to this material displays many fundamental differences.

Above all, this is expressed in Albee's social concretization of events and phenomena, in the psychological complexity of his characters which the playwrights intentionally avoided, abstracting their works from such details and presenting their conclusions as a code of immutable laws. As O'Neill before him, Albee takes life, living reality, as his point of departure. Certain of its features might coincide with the postulates that are the philosophical basis of the theatre of the absurd, but it is far from limited by these whereas that theatre, perceiving the world through the prism of existentialist ideas, allows only elements affirming these ideas to enter its artistic world.

The "godfather" of the theatre of the absurd Martin Esslin, agreed to include Albee's plays in the corpus of this theatre only with certain reservations, observing that Albee incorporates social criticism which is not characteristic of this movement. Other adherents of absurd theatre have written about this and not without some vexation.

"The Zoo Story, The Sandbox, and The American Dream are, on the face of it, absurd plays," writes Brian Way in his essay "Albee and the Absurd", "and yet, if one compares them with the work of Beckett, Ionesco or Pinter, they all retreat from the full implications of the absurd when a certain point is reached. Albee still believes in the validity of reason—that things can be proved, or that events can be shown to have definite meanings—and, unlike Beckett and the others, is scarcely touched by the sense of living in an absurd universe."⁸

But Albee, without a doubt, has borrowed a good deal from the arsenal of absurd theatre. This is above all true of the structural basis of his plays which incorporate many devices worked out by absurd theatre because, as Way explains, these "are so ideally suited to the kind of social criticism Albee intends".⁹

The grotesque stylization of characters, the omitting of logical progressions and links, the deliberate absurdity of dialogue, the use of clichés, the closed structure of the works that emphasizes the static action are all tried devices of absurd theatre, and yet they serve different artistic purposes in the works of Albee.

In Albee's attitude to the theatre of the absurd, one can find a direct link with the tradition of the great American playwright Eugene O'Neill who turned at the beginning of his career to the poetics of expressionist theatre. Forms of avantgarde theatre are similarly combined by Albee with realistic interpretations of characters. The heroes of his plays—Jerry, George, Martha, Agnes, Tobias—are full-blooded characters and not functionally conventionalized social or psychological types. This is one of the basic differences between Albee's dramaturgy and the theatre of the absurd which uses only conventional figures and masks that personify not a living human personality, but an abstract idea.

Thornton Wilder, whose work is also in many ways bound up with O'Neill's tradition, turned not only to twentieth century European theatre (symbolism, expressionism) but to the classical theatre of the East. But his conception of realism, based primarily on the truth of everyday life, was much more restricted than that of O'Neill. As a result, Wilder's work is limited in its humanism and often gives the impression of a cold play of theatrical devices and forms which at times actually increases the distance between events on stage and the audience. But in the resolution of a series of artistic problems, the use of these devices and forms in certain instances resulted in greater capaciousness, precision and range of expression. This is true with regard to the entrances and exits of the characters in his short play *The Long Christmas Dinner* which symbolize various stages in the cycle of human life from birth to death, transforming the history of several generations of one large clan into condensed stage time. It is difficult to determine whether Orson Welles knew of this play when he filmed *Citizen*

Kane; possibly the similarities between the two are coincidental. Welles essentially used the same device, conveying the flow of time through montage, repeatedly changing the attire of the spouses seated at the family table. Interestingly enough, after ten years, the interval between the writing of the play and the filming, the constructive device no longer functions as such but takes on the nature of a metaphor which is able to express the transitoriness of life and the absurdity of the characters' existence with consummate precision.

Purely modernistic plays have consigned O'Neill's polysemantic aesthetics whose centre remained realism to oblivion. The simple semantics of modernism is gaining ground; experiment is entirely identified with conceptual construction of dramatic structures. American drama has experienced the influence of modernism and has undoubtedly been attracted to modernism, for its lure is particularly prevalent in our times, but despite the efforts of critics, no major playwright and no work worth attention have emerged from this trend. In the sixties, the dramaturgy of modernism, which discovered the "happening"—the American version of anti-theatre—in fact loses the last traces of its link to an O'Neillian aesthetic, for the "happening" could not breathe new life into the movement that had lost its internal energy.

In summary, let us repeat that no matter how O'Neill's work is reevaluated, its significance for national American dramaturgy cannot be emphasized enough. Even if his artistic reputation falls (as it did in the late forties and early fifties when it was considered almost good form among critics to find fault with O'Neill), his contribution to his native theatre is immeasurable. Not only was he the founder of a type of literature that had never before been practised in America; he created a vast repertoire ensuring the continuation of this new American art form; he discovered a mine of typical American conflicts and characters which continue to inspire American dramatists to this day. But most importantly, he determined the path of American drama much ahead of time

by affirming realism as its basic method. He stressed the special function of characters allotting realism the leading role in the general system of artistic means. Finally, he affirmed the freedom of drama from canons that regulated the choice of a work's form and thus laid the foundations for the stylistic diversity of American drama. Taken as a whole, these characteristics of American drama can be viewed as its typological features.

NOTES

¹ *O'Neill and His Plays*, ed. by O. Cargill, N. B. Fagin, W. J. Fischer, N. Y. University Press, 1961, p. 20.

² *American Playwrights on Drama*, ed. by H. Frenz, N. Y., Hill and Wahg, 1965, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁴ *Paris Review*, 1966, N 38, p. 84.

⁵ H. Frenz, *Eugene O'Neill*, N. Y., Frederick Ungar, 1971, p. 41.

⁶ *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*, ed. by U. Weisstein, Paris, Didier, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973, p. 23.

⁷ *O'Neill and His Plays*, p. 111.

⁸ *American Treatre*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 10, Lnd., Edward Arnold, 1967, p. 189.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

A. ZVEREV

OPENING THE DOORS OF ASSOCIATION: ON CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY*

Hurried wakes held over the Muse of poetry, as though she were dying before our very eyes, have long seemed to be a sign of the times in the West. They are monotonously alike. How many times have the same questions sounded from the pages of poetry journals and the tribunes of poetry forums, the answers to which are so predictably negative.

Let us recount those questions. Here is the one most often posed: will poetry survive in a society where everyday life is to an unprecedented degree affected by technology, where psychological reactions become increasingly uniform? Or: will the art of poetry remain indispensable at a time when practicality is the governing norm, when the extreme tightness of daily schedules forces the ordinary man to limit his spiritual needs? And yet another: will real poetry hold its ground in the struggle against its countless surrogates, from the pseudo-poetic banalities of Rod McCuen's "best-selling" poems to the pseudo-modernist mystifications of the sort which abound in Paul Carroll's anthology *The Young American Poets*?

One has little confidence in the bombastic utterances

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of those who, while bewailing the demise of poetry, have precisely nothing to contribute. But we should treat in all seriousness the observations—also completely pessimistic at times—of poets and critics who have made genuinely meaningful contributions and whose authority is deservedly high. It is one thing when the decline of poetry is predicted by a man of letters (say, Herbert Marshall McLuhan) who admits that the difficulties confronting real literature in contemporary Western society are the natural results of the social system and makes no attempt to counteract the situation. It is something else again when someone like Robert Penn Warren talks about the problems that threaten the future of poetry, as he does in his essay, "Poetry in a Time of Crack-Up", appearing in the *New York Review of Books* (January 7, 1971).

McLuhan's predictions regarding the revolution in the means of communication, in the course of which poetry is doomed to perish, seem on the face of it just as groundless as the misgivings expressed a century ago that photography would spell the end of painting. Warren's dark forebodings that literature, including poetry, finds itself more and more hemmed in by the simple, mechanical fixation of the stream of reality, are unfortunately not groundless. Warren is hardly right when he asserts that in the "time of crack-up" poetry can find no tribune from which to address the masses: the anti-war American poetry of the sixties disproves this conclusion. One could also dispute Warren's claim that the question of true poetry is exclusively a question of poetic language. After all, the artistically independent cognition of the world and of man cannot be effected under conditions where the poet limits himself to the inventing and perfecting of linguistic structures for the "elite", which could never become a part of "mass culture".

In the end everything is determined by the position of the poet, who can set himself at enmity with his epoch, so that he might break through its cheap stereotypes to the real and reveal it to his reading audience. On the other hand—and there are many cases in point—he might

build an artificial wall between his own creative world and dramatic reality, between his "I" and (to quote William Carlos Williams) the "Here and Now", closing himself off in his own individualism and undermining the very roots that feed his talent.

But these are arguments about peripheral issues; the primary argument is that Warren, in his doubts as to whether poetry really has a place in our day, bases his contention on a sober analysis of the state of affairs in recent American poetry. Warren is not the only one who is dissatisfied with this state of affairs. The point here is not whether poetry as such is ceasing to be, or has already ceased to be, indispensable to man; that could be declared by a specialist in cultural studies who might suggest that artistic surrogates—Jacqueline Susann's novels, say, or television series about cunning, intrepid detectives—completely satisfy aesthetic demands and not of the philistines alone.

What concerns us here are certain critical developments in recent American poetry. When responsible scholars talk about stagnation in poetry, they invariably have the same phenomena in mind. The most important is the growing gulf between the reader and poetry, which is incapable of comprehending and satisfying his spiritual needs. And this inability to establish live and direct contact with the reader is precipitated above all by the fact that many poets feel very little responsibility for the future of their art and assume a literary position which is far too diffuse and allows various compromises with "mass culture".

Such a conclusion might seem, to say the least, arbitrary. One could say that on the contrary, there are very strongly felt elitist, hermetic, ultra-avantgarde tendencies in American poetry, and in doing so one could cite numerous disciples and followers of Ezra Pound and E. E. Cummings, the experimental work of Wallace Stevens, whose poetry demands an extraordinarily high level of cultural perception on the part of the reader, or T. S. Eliot, who elaborated and established an extremely

complex type of poetic language. What sort of compromise is possible here with "mass culture", whose language is simple, hackneyed and universally accessible?

Compromise, however, proves to be entirely possible as soon as the true artistic complexity of the same Eliot or Stevens is taken in isolation from the problems of content which gave rise to their poetics, as soon as one perceives it simply as a sign of "contemporary" poetic thought, as soon as it becomes a stereotype and is transformed into empty intellectual coquetry. It would be dangerous to underestimate the ability of "mass culture" to integrate into its system of "values" those phenomena which *externally* have nothing in common with it but which are not opposed to it in *essence*, namely, in its attempts to reduce the spiritual needs of people to a common plane and to deprive them of their independent perception of the world and orientation in the world. Hypertrophied "intellectuality" can become exactly the same sort of cliché as accentuated "simplicity" and "accessibility".

Here is one graphic—and sad—example which confirms the above. Allen Ginsberg is perhaps the most talented poet of the American "new wave" which arose in the middle of the fifties. From the outset, of course, one should not speak of Ginsberg merely as a herald of the temper of the Beat Generation. He emerged as a successor to Whitman and Williams; he rebelled against the canons of objectivism and supra-personal creative work propagated by the "New Criticism", trying to bring back to American poetry the spirit of concern for the ills and anxieties of the epoch, to lend it once more a publicistic quality, bright hues, the truth of feeling, the psychological richness of the word. When one rereads his early collections today one is amazed at how much Ginsberg was able to foretell with respect to the thematics and tone of the best poets of the sixties. Ginsberg was perhaps the first to begin speaking of the tragic chaos of everyday existence in the impersonality of large cities, how the thoughts and feelings of ordinary consumers in "mass

society" have become mechanical and monotonous; he was among the first to talk about the domination of the "standard", the threat of a catastrophic nuclear war, the insignificance of what has been achieved, despite the enormous creative potentialities of twentieth century civilization.

Such poems as "America", "Moloch" ("Howl", Part II), and "In the Baggage Room at Greyhound" elevated Ginsberg above the poets of his generation, making him the most "industrial" (as Mayakovsky once characterized Sandburg) and urban of these poets. "A Supermarket in California" may even today be regarded, perhaps, as the best piece written by Ginsberg:

"Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be lonely.

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?"¹

The appearance of a genuinely significant new name in poetry is always an event; great hopes were understandably attached to Ginsberg's name. Why is it that he failed to justify these hopes? Usually the explanation is given that Ginsberg did not possess a sufficiently well formulated system of poetics and failed to work on it, relying only on his lyrical "confessional" talent and refusing to take into account that poetry is "a sort of inspired mathematics" which provides us with the "*formulae* of human emotions". There is, of course, an element of truth in this explanation: Ginsberg often lacked creative discipline. But this was scarcely the primary reason.

The most important, rather, was his striving to preserve the pose of a "rebel", even after the "rebellion" of the beatniks consisted of nothing more than purely external forms of behavior readily and painlessly assimilated by "mass culture". Even in the sixties Ginsberg went against the current, creating a world of free association in his poetry; but more and more often the game of associations proved to be lacking in logic and lyrical unity. These were poems without a conceptual core which stunned the reader with their extreme (and occasionally excessive) frankness with which the poet spoke of himself. But in this narrative the characteristics of the age and the men it has created which are so precisely captured, are somehow smoothed over and washed away by cheap sensationalism and superficial philosophizing. Everything else, including the exasperatingly eclectic mosaic of images, rhythms and intonations which Ginsberg borrowed from a wide range of poets, from Pound to Lorca was merely the consequence of this transformation of Ginsberg's unique and bright individuality into a sort of cheap, popular rebel-poet just as integral to "mass culture" (for there was, strictly speaking, no rebellion by that time) as is the poet-hedonist, poet-intellectual or poet-bard of "simple human feelings".

Of course in *Reality Sandwiches* (1963), *Planet News* (1968) and *The Fall of America* (1973) truly significant poetry broke through to the surface. Hardly anyone today would dare to assert that Ginsberg is finished as a poet; he is a great, strong talent. In his best works there is a dominant feeling of irreplaceable loss which entails for man a growing alienation, a sense of bewilderment in a cold world governed by machines and automatons, where consumer standards of life are all-powerful. Ginsberg is capable of achieving a complex coordination of image-series in his poems, of uniting them in the masterly rhythm and music of each line—music that is sometimes atonal and harsh, but unmistakably contemporary in its rendition.

Nonetheless an important poet cannot limit himself to the preaching of superficial, pseudo-buddhist mysticism and the glorification of sexual "freedom", which simply signifies moral dissoluteness. The tragedy of Ginsberg is that of the unrealized potentialities of a talent which has developed neither an integral artistic perception of the world nor a really serious theme or reference points for his world view, who has substituted affected and empty "rebellion" for creative work.

Unfortunately Ginsberg is not alone in this respect. It is dangerous to judge the state of poetry when one's field of vision is occupied only by a few outstanding phenomena—the lyrics of Marianne Moore, say, or Robert Lowell's philosophical poems—since we are, after all, discussing contemporary American poetry. The achievements of great poets remain indisputable and true regardless of the fluctuations of reader demand. But the level of poetry today is not determined exclusively by these achievements, especially if what interests us is the extent of its social impact and the intensity of response which it evokes in the consciousness of readers.

And if we turn to indices of this sort, we are hardly likely to be instilled with a feeling of complete satisfaction by the state of recent American poetry. We would scarcely be justified in treating this poetry without paying the requisite attention to the anxiety which contemporary poetry calls forth in so competent a specialist in the field as Louis Untermeyer; he is oppressed by the disappearance in poetry of signs signifying the real world, by poetry's inability to find "words and music that are not only endearing but ennobling in an ignoble world. . .".²

I am quoting Louis Untermeyer's essay, which for me is one of the most serious critical discourses of the seventies. I have only to express my concurrence with the author in his assertion that in recent American poetry no genuinely brilliant new names have emerged, that the majority of young—and not so young—poets are free neither of vulgar, mediocre "journalese" which cheapens the poetic word, nor of empty intellectual coquetry, the

desire to seem ultra-modern, which leads only to impersonality and inexpressiveness in the use of poetic language.

And in fact under present conditions the American poet often finds himself "harassed by what he sees, hears and reads about, by the headlines in the daily paper, by the radio news-on-the-hour, by the inexorable television commentator..."³ And we as readers of such a poet have already ceased to be surprised when we see how "the creative impulse flounders and all too often [the poet] sinks in a welter of jargon, hoked-up journalism, and a kind of cryptic kitsch wherein old clichés are exchanged for current stereotypes".⁴

Examples? There is no end to them. Take, for example, Robert Creeley—a gifted poet, no doubt. The purport of all his recent utterances is the struggle against "programmed poetry", he battles against it both in his poetic works and in his pronouncements regarding the meaning of the poet's work (cf. his interview in the *Paris Review*, 1968, No. 44). One could understand and support him if he had in mind the struggle against static forms, against bad poetry which masks artistic helplessness with superficial topical thematics. But this is not the most important thing for Creeley. He wants to demonstrate the indemonstrable: the complete autonomy of poetry as art, the right of the poet to occupy himself solely with the expression of his own impressions, experiences and even physical sensations; it is tacitly—and not too modestly—assumed that the personal experience of Robert Creeley has or will have direct universal significance.

"...I would be very much cheered to realize that someone had felt what I had been feeling in writing.... Yet this can't be the context of my own writing. Later I may have horrible doubts indeed as to whether it will ever be read by other persons, but it can never enter importantly into my writing. So I cannot say that communication in the sense of telling someone is what I'm engaged with."⁵

Such feelings are widespread among contemporary poets. After all, is this not one of the main causes of the crisis situation in which American poetry finds itself despite all its indisputable gains and a great wealth of personalities it has at its disposal? Of course no genuine poet will write or be able to write about things which he himself has not experienced or felt or thought over in some form or another. But no true poet will strive, or be capable of striving (consciously and consistently) for a breaking of ties with the reader, for subjectivism in its extreme forms.

Creeley's rejection of "communication" implies not only complete contempt for his audience, without whose participation poetry could never fully exist and develop, but also a declaration of the poet's right not to pay heed to the imagerial structure of verse, the laws of rhythm, or even linguistic norms. Any arbitrary act is justified, any form of desecration of elementary norms, without which there can be no poetic text—which leads to such extremes as Aram Saroyan's "verses", which consist of the single word "crickets" being repeated thirty-seven times. Or we might find three or four completely unrelated words arranged arbitrarily on a page, united into a poetic image, as it were, by the magic touch of the poet. With full justification a poetic text is transformed into a rebus which for the reader who is not prepared for such diversions or has no desire to solve it, is as difficult to decipher as the mysteries of Jungian psychology. Poetry lacking in content, the total isolation of the poet from the concerns of his times, intellectual posing—all these things are made to be justified.

All these extremes, the result of a falsely understood conception of creative freedom and rather unstable world outlook, have left a noticeable trace on contemporary poetry; it is therefore not surprising that a mood of anxiety affects those critics who try to predict the future of American poetry in all seriousness and with a sense of responsibility.

I acknowledge that the description of American poetry as drawn on the first few pages of this essay makes the picture look gloomy and gives no cause for optimism. But I have only stressed those aspects which seem to me the most essential; I have earmarked those problems to which we must devote serious attention, for they are not only current, but are also difficult in their resolution. I would not like to give the impression that these aspects and these problems are the only ones, that American poetry, which has recently been passing through a certain period of crisis, does not at the moment possess sufficient strength and potential to overcome it. On the contrary, I fully share Louis Untermeyer's belief that "poets to come will fulfill the promise of the best poets of the present".⁶ Moreover it seems to me that among the poets who are writing today there are not a few who are earnestly trying to solve the problems facing American poetry today, to re-establish contact with the reader without abandoning complexity, expressiveness, or the intellectual and psychological richness of language developed by American poetry in the twentieth century.

Let us name a few names. From my point of view, their ranks must above all include the most talented representatives of the post-war generation: Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur, the late John Berryman, followed by Louis Simpson, Edward Reed Whittmore and William Jay Smith. Here we should also mention two poets of the Black Mountain school: Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan. Of the beatnik poets I would mention Lawrence Ferlinghetti; we have already spoken of Allen Ginsberg. Finally, among the poets who asserted themselves in the late fifties and early sixties, we should single out Sylvia Plath, whose death was truly an unredeemable loss.

Such a selection is, of course, somewhat subjective; another critic writing an essay of this sort might include a few names not mentioned here, and would pass over in silence some of the names I have listed. But if we

limit our acquaintance to the poems of those poets I have singled out, certain characteristic features of contemporary American poetry will, I believe, emerge with sufficient clarity.

The most important feature, in my view, is that sometime in the middle of the fifties there began to prevail a tendency to speak of the present, of the "Here and Now", in William Carlos Williams' words.

The first post-war decade belonged to T. S. Eliot. The poets of this period felt an affinity with his anxious forebodings of imminent spiritual catastrophe in Western society and his desire to demonstrate by means of art the possibility of harmony and integrity in a disharmonious and disintegrating world. William Carlos Williams' "discovery" marked a fundamental change. Williams is a poet attracted by the variety of life in its everyday flow, which reveals its beauty and drama:

*They call me and I go.
It is a frozen road
past midnight, a dust
of snow caught
in the rigid wheeltracks.
The door opens.
I smile, enter and
shake off the cold.
Here is a great woman
on her side in the bed.
She is sick,
perhaps vomiting,
perhaps laboring
to give birth to
a tenth child. Joy! Joy!⁷*

He was Eliot's antipode in every respect: not abstraction and speculation, but the emphatically material, plastic, visible image; not spiritual escapism, but an indissoluble tie with the American land; not a cult of alienation, but resistance to it, in order to teach men to see, hear,

and perceive anew. Eliot is a poet of ideas, Williams, a poet of the concrete. He does not make pronouncements or explanations; rather he shows American reality on the most ordinary level, revealing in the "local" what is universally significant and emphasizing purely American images, language and composition.

I am by no means inclined to minimize T. S. Eliot's significance for contemporary poetry, though I do believe it is an exaggeration to call him the greatest poet of the century writing in the English language, as do many critics in England and America. But it would be difficult to overestimate his contribution to the significant growth of poetic culture and the development of poetic language. The proportion, balance, philosophical depth and poetic harmony of *The Four Quartets* are a significant poetic achievement. T. S. Eliot's impact on contemporary poetry is universally recognized. But those of his successors who accepted his poetic system unconditionally ran into serious difficulties: first, the dangers of "incommunicability", inescapable in view of Eliot's desire to saturate the poetic text with a mass of historical and cultural materials, and second, the isolation of the poet's creative world from the reality of Today, live and full of conflicts and anxieties.

In the poetry of the first post-war years both these dangers were more than perceptible; a crisis was brewing—an excessive concentration on linguistic elements and the "learnedness" of American poetry at the time were not undergirded by material in keeping with the spiritual and social life of the times. An "academic" spirit reigned, the anemic atmosphere of the greenhouse descended, and even strong talents withered in this environment. Under such conditions even a close study of T. S. Eliot or Wallace Stevens was bound to be accompanied by a formal rather than creative assimilation of their experience. What was needed was to break through to reality once more, and Williams helped to make this happen.

Robert Bly characterizes contemporary American po-

etry aphoristically and precisely: "... a vast effort is being made once more to open the doors of association".⁸ Free association had always distinguished American poetry from its European counterparts dominated by a search for strict forms; the "founder" of twentieth century American poetry, Walt Whitman, established the principle behind this fundamental difference, a principle which can be traced throughout the succeeding periods. In the twenties and thirties Whitman's followers—Carl Sandburg and Archibald MacLeish—demonstrated the topicality and significance of his poetic system; without minimizing the contribution of these poets, one must nonetheless acknowledge that in the word combination "free verse" what mattered for them was only the first component, that sometimes their work obliterated the boundary separating the fact of art from the simple copying of reality in its chaos and lack of order, artistic reality from the surrounding world.

T. S. Eliot appeared at this point as a force capable of offsetting the erosion of the borders of verse which was already taking place, as though by inertia. The borders of poetry were re-established; but it became difficult to speak of "the doors of association", because for Eliot's followers there existed only one path: that of intellectualism. Poetry was impoverished. In striving to express the "Here and Now", not through thematics or "news-paper" topicality, but by means of the very texture of the poetic work, its intonation, rhythm and language, Williams synthesized the best aspects of Whitman's poetics and the discoveries of "learned" poets oriented to the manner of Ezra Pound and Eliot, and colored this synthesis with his own unique individuality. Outward simplicity and conscientiously thought-out rhythmic correlation of his poetry are striking, as is the naturalness and precision of his thought, the free play of association and the strict measured quality of the line and even the word—its heaviness and length. He characterized his style and creative impulse perhaps more precisely than any critic:

*You seem quite normal. Can you tell me? Why
 does one want to write a poem?
 Because it's there to be written.
 Oh. A matter of inspirations then?
 Of necessity.
 Oh. But what sets it off?
 I am that he whose brain
 are scattered
 aimlessly. . . .*⁹

Thanks to Williams American poetry broke away from the closed framework of literary reminiscences, literary norms of acceptance and non-acceptance, literary conflicts and literary means for overcoming them. The many doors into the world of associations appeared to open. Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Rexroth, Denise Levertov—all of these poets learned a great deal from Williams, both in a purely professional way, and in a broader sense: Williams is the sort of poet who keenly feels the secret drama of the epoch, but at the same time is tied flesh and blood to the "Here and Now".

He is Whitman's true successor in contemporary poetry, and the Whitman school found in the author of "Paterson" and "Pictures from Breughel" a poet capable of resolving on a qualitatively new level the problem that was once resolved in *Leaves of Grass*: to embody in verse the many faces of contemporary American life. Williams' poetic vocabulary and rhythm are, of course, completely different from that of such disciples of Whitman as Archibald MacLeish; today's poets perceive Whitman's poetics through Williams' experience. This fact can be easily ascertained if we take by way of example only Robert Duncan's "Night Scenes", so similar to Whitman's urbanistic lyrics, yet so clearly different from them in portrayal and sound:

*Our nerves respond to the police-cars cruising; a part
 of the old divine threat. Now in each time the design is
 still moving. The city roars and is a lion. But it is
 a deep element, a treacherous leviathan.*¹⁰

It seems to me that still one more feature characteristic of contemporary American poetry finds its source in Williams: the search for harmony, which should not be understood as some sort of cosmic philosophical serenity and not as contentedness, but as the integrity of poetical perception, presupposing the poet's involvement in the most burning issues of the day. In 1959, Denise Levertov writes:

"...I do not believe that a violent imitation of the horrors of our times is the concern of poetry. Horrors are taken for granted. Disorder is ordinary. People in general take more and more 'in their stride'—hides grow thicker. I long for poems, of an inner harmony in utter contrast to the chaos in which they exist. Insofar as poetry has a social function it is to awaken sleepers by other means than shock."¹¹

If we limit ourselves to the emotional impression created by such verses by Denise Levertov as "Life at War" (or Sylvia Plath's "Tulips"), we will hardly be struck by their harmony; this is burning, tragic poetry. But we are concerned here with artistic harmony, based on a feeling of the enduring quality of life and the great creative strength it holds. We are speaking here of internal harmony, of the law that opposes the principle of "vomit-it-all-out", which Allen Ginsberg has been following recently without realizing that in doing so the poet-creator is transformed into a poet-registrar (if not an hysterical poet).

It is curious that the youngest generation of poets (if, of course, we judge it not by Aram Saroyan, but by its serious representatives) instinctively feels this need for internal harmony, without which poetry could not exist. Ron Schreiber's anthology *31 New American Poets* (1969) is of some interest for precisely this reason. Even the works of the most promising authors represented here are, as a rule, rather immature; their civic passion is genuine, but superficial, and their confessionalism is passionate but shallow. But the best of them—Jack Anderson, for example, or Gail Dusenbery—have grasped the fact that me-

rely piling up sharp, blatant testimony to the chaos and tragedy of life makes the text at best a fact of political journalism, but not poetry.

It appears that Diane Wakoski is gradually beginning to understand this; for too long now she has lacked an integral organizing principle and that feeling of internal necessity in a poem which Williams expressed ("Because it's there to be written"). The same instinctively discovered harmony, which is organically related to the immediacy of poetic experience, is an attractive feature of the late Anne Sexton's collection *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (1975).

Summing up the poetry of the sixties in the *New York Times Book Review* Louis Simpson entitled his essay "Long Live Blake! Down with Donne!" It goes without saying that in the sixties poetry freed itself from the influence of the "New Criticism", which had taught that the poem "was a construction rather than a performance", that poetry became simpler and employed more ordinary language, became more accessible, more sincere; that the free play of fantasy pushed the concern for exact proportionality into the background. Simpson supports his judgements with quotes from the works of Galway Kinnell, Robert Bly, and the Black poets—LeRoi Jones and Dudley Randall. In a certain sense Simpson is undoubtedly right, but it seems to me that there is a touch of extremism in his conception.

In the history of poetry one outstanding phenomenon is not able to completely displace a preceding phenomenon ranking high on the scale of artistic value; one should speak rather of continuity, of creative assimilation and reinterpretation, and not of a rebellion which leaves no stone of a given tradition standing. The appearance of Blake by no means depreciates Donne's significance; so in contemporary poetry, the interest in open forms, in "common American things" and "plain language" which appeared in the sixties in no way replaced the need for strict rhythmical and compositional unity and internal integrity, qualities recognized already in the first post-

war years. Just so the growing ability to unite "openness" of form with elaborate internal unity testifies to the indisputable mastery manifested by the best contemporary poets.

But Louis Simpson is undeniably right in another of his statements. His essay begins with the assertion that "in the 1960's poetry got off the page and onto the platform", and this really is a noteworthy feature of recent American poetry. The years of the war in Vietnam, when the poets of America formed a solid front, joining forces on the pages of protest anthologies (the best is Walter Lowenfels' *Where Is Vietnam?*) were a time when poetry gradually overcame its elitism and hermetism and began to reattract the attention of the general public. It strived to speak to the reader of the burning problems of life, strived to feel and record in verse its pulse, its nerves, its contrasts, aspirations, disappointments, fears and illusions, the whole spiritual and psychological world of the ordinary American. Poetry sensed its own direct participation in the most acute topical problems of the day; the "I" of the poet now stood for the poet himself, and his creative work became a direct account of the present. The poet began to feel with immeasurably greater force his responsibility for everything taking place in the country and in the world, and the need to protest—against the war, against racism, against conformism.

Poetry "got onto the platform", which was bound to affect its style, imagery and rhythm. On the one hand the role of conversational turns of phrase and intonations grew stronger, with the familiar tokens of everyday reality introduced on a broader scale; this was accompanied by certain exaggerations and excesses, of which we have already spoken. On the other hand the rhythms of poetry became stricter and simpler, the key words whose alternation supports the whole corpus of a poem written in free verse were more graphically singled out and emphasized; the poem often approached the song, revealing the influence of rock and beat; all this was a natural consequence of reorientation of the audience's perception from

visual to aural. It would be difficult at this point to conclude definitely that this tendency has resulted in genuinely new rhythmic and intonational means, but the phenomenon itself is significant and deserves attention.

But most important, poetry "from the platform" realized its calling. Many poets who several years ago could in all justice be assigned to the ranks of "formal objectivism" now feel a live and direct tie with America, are anxious about the country and feel their fate to be intimately linked with that of the nation. In "The Arrivistes" (1950) or "Good News of Death" (1955) the same Louis Simpson assumed the position of a detached observer of American life, attentive but dispassionate. Sometimes this emotional position was replaced by a more complex sensation: a feeling of alienation was conjoined with the realization—which, it appears, could not be avoided—of the poet's obligatory participation in American life. Read such lines as "Stumpfoot on 42nd Street" or "American Dreams" and this complex feeling will not go unnoticed, since everything here is determined by this strange feeling:

*A Negro sprouts from the pavement like an asparagus.
One hand beats a drum and cymbal;
He plays a trumpet with the other.*

*He flies the American flag;
When he goes walking, from stump to stump,
It twitches, and swoops, and flaps.¹²*

In the sixties there was a change in tonality. *At the End of the Open Road* (1963) and the verses which followed force us, in my estimation, to re-evaluate Simpson's role and place in contemporary poetry. Earlier his "persona" was that of the poet as an unexpected guest, an "outsider" on this earth, and the poet sometimes more easily grasped the meaning of what was really going on precisely because a perceptible distance was maintained between him and the life surrounding him. Today, rather than speaking of a "persona", one should speak of a

personality formed by the American reality of our time which recognizes its blood ties with that reality; the lyrical principle is stronger, the "I" of the poet has come into direct contact with an incomparably wider circle of life phenomena, and Simpson's perception and interpretation of these phenomena is colored by the reflection of the poet's individuality, which, in my view, is a quality in poetry that is more valuable than possessing some universal doctrine, some abstract and speculative concept into which the impressions of life are "corralled".

Let us consider another sort of example. Lawrence Ferlinghetti was long regarded as one of the most "confessional" of poets—in his first collections almost everything refers to the author himself, to his human cast and originality. "Confessionalism" in this instance was a quality pushing Ferlinghetti toward utter subjectivism rather than helping him to give full expression to his own world. The cult of escapism inherent to the beatniks also made a certain impression on Ferlinghetti, and while it is true that he did not go "on the road" and seek his Dharma, he did not avoid spiritual escapism. This tendency was manifested in the most various ways, but the stimulus for it remained the same: it could be defined as a striving after counter-culture in poetry. Hence such qualities in Ferlinghetti's early poems as an extreme frankness which became openly shocking, or the deliberate arbitrariness of associations, or the senseless assimilation of various invariably avantgarde, "rebellious" influences (with Pound and René Char side by side).

The chaotic quality of this endless "confession", which could not be contained in individual collections and demanded entire cycles, made it difficult to distinguish the motifs which Ferlinghetti, strictly speaking, was one of the first to introduce into American poetry and which were to be considerably developed at a later date. In the sixties Ferlinghetti, who also took to the platform, was able to curb this stormy, uncontrollable stream of "blasts and benedictions". His poetry became incomparably more concise, laconic, and structured. This allowed the poet to

impart true significance to thought, the primary matter of all creative activity, including poetry.

In so asserting I have in mind not only Ferlinghetti's political poems, e.g., his outstanding "Assassination Raga"; it seems to me that Ferlinghetti's earlier themes are now filled with serious and topical matter, have crystallized, and their significance can no longer be disputed. The poet painfully reacts to the phenomenon of the "one-dimensional man" in "mass society", to the contrasts in this society and to the outbreaks of blind violence which so often afflict it. Many poets are discussing these problems today, and not only in America. Ferlinghetti was one of the first to incorporate these themes into his work, but very serious shifts in social consciousness, and consequently in poetry, were required in order for him to move from instinctive to conscious discovery, from chaos to artistic integrity and harmony.

Simpson and Ferlinghetti began at different poles, but recently they seem to be moving closer and closer together. In general centripetal tendencies reigned in American poetry as it passed from the sixties into the seventies. Poets have chosen different ways of resolving the same problem—how to express the American "Here and Now" in genuinely contemporary and complex poetic forms without falling into elitism. The problem, of course, is incredibly difficult, and many false solutions have been and will continue to be proffered. But even a false solution is an attempt to find a true one, and the more intensive these attempts, the sooner will appear—tomorrow? in ten years?—a poet capable of synthesizing the labors of his innumerable predecessors and creating the sort of poetic language the times demand.

NOTES

¹ Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California", *The New American Poetry*, N.Y., 1960.

² Louis Untermeyer, "The Law of Order, the Promise of Poetry" in *Saturday Review*, March 20, 1971, p. 60.

³ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Paris Review*, 1968, No. 44, p. 173.

⁶ Louis Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 60.

⁷ William Carlos Williams, "Complaint" in *Selected Poems*.

⁸ Robert Bly, *Naked Poetry*, ed. by C. Berg and R. Mezey, N.Y., 1969, p. 162.

⁹ William Carlos Williams, "The Desert Music" in *Naked Poetry*, 1969.

¹⁰ Robert Duncan, "Night Scenes" in *The Voice That Is Great Within Us. American Poetry of the XXth Century*, 1970, Toronto (N.Y.), Lnd., 1970, p. 459.

¹¹ *The New American Poetry*, N.Y., 1960.

¹² Louis Simpson, "Stumpfoot on 42nd Street" in *The Voice That Is Great Within Us*, p. 519.

A. ANIKST

**AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM:
A PERSONAL VIEW***

The reader would do well to mark the subtitle to this essay. A book on American criticism has already been written by a group of scholars from the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of World Literature. It contains articles on some of the most important trends and the most distinguished representatives of American literary scholarship. While I could offer the reader a summary of that book, I will leave that to an American who is interested in that subject. I have another goal.

I want to tell the reader how I personally came to know American criticism. In presenting myself to my readers, I should warn them that I am not a scholar specializing only in American literature, although I have written on the subject. For that reason, my story may not prove typical. It is, rather, of a most personal nature.

I began reading books about American literature in the late nineteen-twenties. This may lead the reader to conclude, with some justice, that I belong to the ancients. Now that I am more or less familiar with American critical literature as a whole, I realize that some of my tale will strike the American reader as strange if not simply

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funny. Well I don't fear your laughter and I am not ashamed to tell the truth.

I was seventeen when I first picked up a book on American literature. It was written not by a professional literary scholar but by a novelist who, at the time, was particularly popular in Russia: Upton Sinclair. His social novels were extraordinarily highly praised here for their pointed criticism of the vices of capitalism in the United States. I don't know whether the younger generation still reads Sinclair; perhaps even his name has been forgotten.

Two books by Upton Sinclair, *Mammon Art and Money Writes!*, were published in the Soviet Union in 1925 and 1928; these give a picture of the pressure exerted by American publishers and the hypocritical bourgeois public on talented writers, demanding that they refuse to depict the dark sides of American life. This all coincided with Russian readers' knowledge of Jack London's fictional autobiography *Martin Eden* which at the time had already gone through ten Russian editions. In addition there was a Russian translation of Floyd Dell's (do you know who *he* is?) first book, *Upton Sinclair. A Study in Social Protest*. This is a total picture of my first acquaintance with American criticism.

The pamphlets of Upton Sinclair were written in the spirit of the literary "muckrakers"; the facts stated here exposed the gloomy truths about the influence of capitalism on the literary conditions in the United States. But there was no literary criticism per se here. However in those years such sociological research was popular in Europe, not only in our country, but in Germany. The younger generation perhaps does not know that today's interest in the sociology of literature began in the twenties when the economic crisis following the First World War and the intensification of the class struggles, leading to a wave of proletarian revolutions following the October Revolution in Russia, created a suitable atmosphere for the research of the social conditions for the development of literature.

Soviet critics also examined Russian literature from a sociological point of view, exposing those concrete conditions under which our classic authors wrote. But some critics forgot that literature is literature, and ignored the artistic aspect, stressing only social moments in the masterpieces of poetry and prose.

Having enrolled in the literary department of Moscow Pedagogical Institute at the age of twenty, I came across W. Trent and J. Erskine's *Great American Writers* which had been translated into Russian in 1914. Here I first read simple, somewhat naive descriptions of the masterworks of American literature and biographies of its great writers, most of whom were already known to me in translation. Particularly well known in Russia were prosaists James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain and Bret-Harte, and poets Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Walt Whitman; the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson were also familiar to us. These had been translated in the nineteenth century; but in the twentieth century, the amount of American literature in Russian grew extraordinarily. In the twenties, dozens of books written by the most diverse authors were translated and issued yearly.

As a student, I began to study the English language which at the time was much less fashionable than German or French. Soon I could read American literature and criticism in the original. But I spent most of my graduate school years studying English literature. At this time I developed a passion for Shakespeare to whom I devoted many years of study. By the way, one of the first books on the British bard that I read belonged to the American scholar Barrett Wendell (1904). He wrote a textbook of American literature and *A Literary History of America* (1900). He had a Victorian understanding of Shakespeare. He worshipped the Brahmins of American literature. One can judge his literary views by his opinion of *Leaves of Grass*. He found it "confused, inarticulate, and surging in a mad kind of rhythm which sounds as if hexameters were trying to bubble through sewage". The Russian reader found this reaction strange, to say the least, for Kor-

nei Chukovsky had already made a vivid translation of some Whitman's verse in 1907, soon after the first Russian revolution. Wendell's views coincided with those of the czarist censors. Chukovsky's second edition of translations was banned in 1914 and appeared only after the October Revolution in 1918.

As a graduate student and then a lecturer on the history of English and American literature, I began to more or less systematically read works by American writers and books of literary scholarship. These were available to me from three sources. The first was our Lenin Library whose collection ranks with that of the British Museum, the Library of Congress, and the Bibliothèque Nationale of France. The second was the Library of Foreign Literature which has a particularly good selection of books on the humanities. Finally, in used book stores I was able to acquire all sorts of editions. Gradually I accumulated an extensive library which served my needs. There were also smaller libraries located in various scientific institutes as, for example, in the Institute of World Literature. If my knowledge of American literary criticism is lacking in certain areas, this is not because the books cannot be found in Moscow, but because I for some reason or another have not yet got to them.

Perhaps the reader will be interested to know that before World War II, I read Fred L. Pattee's *Cambridge History of American Literature* and found it rather dry. Carl and Mark Van Doren's *American and British Literature Since 1890*, on the other hand, pleased me. I also came to know such popular books as John Macy's *The Spirit of American Literature* and Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Story of American Literature*. I was most impressed by Charles and Mary Beard's *The Rise of American Civilization*. These were the scholarly works that were most basic in my study of the history of American literature.

Once in a used book store I found F. V. Calverton's *Sex Expression in Literature* (1927); soon afterwards I discovered that the author was one of the founders of sociological criticism in the United States and already

in 1925 claimed that "a sociological interpretation of literature" was essential. His book *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932) was one of the first attempts to apply this method to the literature of the United States. Although the book was theoretically sound, we did not consider it to be "Marxist", while in America it was believed to be of this philosophy. My colleagues and I did not consider Calverton, but Granville Hicks to be the first Marxist historian of American literature. His book *The Great Tradition* (1933) was in this sense a landmark for us. While we did not sympathize with all of his judgements, we regarded his book as a point of departure for future research.

The tense atmosphere of the great depression lasting from 1929 to 1932, which told heavily on the United States, led intellectuals of the thirties to radical and socialist viewpoints. Many of them joined the American Communist Party for which they paid dearly in the McCarthy period. "The red decade", as Americans called it, witnessed a profound interest in social aspects of literary criticism. As we know, the stabilization of capitalism, the defeat of the Spanish republicans and the onset of the Second World War changed the intellectual climate of America. Many rejected Communism. In particular, this was the case with Granville Hicks. In considering his evolution, one cannot help but express surprise at the fact that although his knowledge and comprehension of literature undoubtedly increased and his skills matured, even bourgeois historians of literary criticism call only the Granville Hicks, who, by his own account, erred and was full of illusions. All of his subsequent work, although scholarly sound, lacks the fire that inspired the book written when he was only thirty.

We, like the Americans, were impressed by V. L. Parrington's three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought*. Like many of our critics, he researched the economic and social bases of the development of literary thought. While he did not share the Marxist view that the class struggle was the moving force of all social and

spiritual development, his picture of ideological contradictions provided sufficient material to allow Marxists to come to necessary conclusions. We were, however, disappointed that the book ended abruptly without dealing with the contemporary period. Still, thanks to Parrington we learned a great deal about the spiritual life and wealth of ideas in America during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No doubt many Americans also discovered things of interest in his works. Before Parrington's book, the only major intellectual trend in American thought was believed to be transcendentalism. Now it was clear that there were many others.

Bernard Smith's *Forces in American Criticism* (1939) was perceived by us almost as a continuation of Parrington's book. Bourgeois literary historians looked down upon it, for they believed that the author's Marxist outlook prevented him from giving a true picture of American thought. This opinion is not justified. Despite the book's faults (and who is perfect?) Smith was the first to attempt a social history of literary criticism. Much of the work is simplistic, much is treated subjectively, but it could not have been otherwise. All historians of American literary criticism were partisans of a given viewpoint.

Now it is customary to look down upon the simplistic sociology of Upton Sinclair, but even the subtle, profound ideas of Van Wyck Brooks in his books *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920) and *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925) have something in common with it. We become convinced of the pressures exerted by bourgeois America on her greatest humorist whose gift for satire was fettered, and on the writer who belonged to a great intellectual culture and fled from American pragmatism and mercantilism to Europe.

For myself and for other scholars of American literature in this country, Van Wyck Brooks' monumental books on the history of American literature and culture were of great value. These included: *New England: The Indian Summer, 1865-1915* (1940), *The World of Washington*

Irving (1944), *The Times of Melville and Whitman* (1947) and *The Confident Years: 1885-1915* (1952). As I see it, there are no finer books for foreigners who want to understand the spirit of American culture than these fundamental volumes. (By the way, a two-volume edition of Van Wyck Brooks' works has been issued here.) The broad historical and cultural background, subtle psychological portraits of writers, penetrating evaluation of their works, and admirable style of these books made them models of literary scholarship designed for a broad range of educated readers. The works of F. O. Matthiessen, a conscientious and perceptive critic, have also been published in this country.

I was aided in my efforts to become acquainted with American criticism by anthologies. Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Book of Modern Criticism* (1919) was the first such source that I consulted. Then I absorbed material from many similar collections, beginning with Joel E. Spingharn's *Criticism in America: Its Function and Its Status* (1924) and continuing until I had mastered Clarence Arthur Brown's *The Achievement of American Criticism* (1954), Edgar Stanley Hyman's *The Critical Performance* (1956), and Harold Beaver's *American Critical Essays* (1959). I won't enumerate all of the anthologies that were accessible to me, but I do want to express my gratitude to their compilers who made our task easier and freed us from the necessity of going through countless magazines and scholarly collections.

This was no substitute for reading those general works and monographs which I will not specify here. My reading matter was determined by two factors: the demands of lectures given by me before and immediately following the war, and my own literary work, begun in 1950, at the request of magazines and publishing houses for essays on American writers. If one is asked to write a preface to the works of Dreiser, one reads about him; should the request concern O. Henry, one correspondingly searches for appropriate material. Naturally we each have our special literary interests which lead us to study a given

author or literature. I have researched various American themes. But I have always been interested in criticism as such. I confess that I have often read criticism for its own sake. I derive great pleasure from reading good critical work. Sometimes I find the criticism of certain authors more interesting than the works of those authors. In any case, I have a keener perception of those writers to whom I have been introduced through criticism. In our era, criticism has become an independent branch of literature. Not only does it reflect literature, but is itself a reflection of reality which may at times be as philosophically and aesthetically significant as belle-lettres and drama. Modern dramas of ideas have been profoundly illuminated in criticism and precisely this factor determines the social significance of modern criticism, in particular American criticism.

I was interested to observe pragmatic America gradually discovering the aesthetic values of Europe, first its distant past in Henry Adams' *Mont Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1913), then its art in James Hunecker's *Promenades of an Impressionist* (1910), and finally the symbolism of the late nineteenth century and the modernism of the early twenties in Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931). Russia was attracted by these trends before America, at the turn of the century, and created her own variant of this aesthetic culture in the years preceding the revolution.

Somewhat tardily, I became familiar with the debates between the neo-humanists Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More and those intellectuals whom they called "barbarians": Randolph Bourne, H. L. Mencken, Van Wyck Brooks, Lewis Mumford and others who opposed Victorianism in American culture. Naturally I sympathized with those who broadened the vision of literature, repudiated hypocritical moralizing and cleared the way for a thorough, truthful illumination of reality.

I won't conceal the fact that I always liked bold, sharp-tongued critics. I realized that H. L. Mencken was alien to my own philosophy but this did not prevent me from

enthusiastically following his works though, as it happened, I was a milder critic.

An important phenomenon in American culture was the presence of people who had absorbed the latest cultural trends in Europe. This was the major intellectual current at the turn of the century. During the forties, an opposing trend appeared, most strongly expressed in Alfred Kazin's book *On Native Grounds* (1942). The very name illustrates the principle. In our country too, there was a movement to affirm the independence of a national literature. This was a natural result of the surge of patriotism during the war against fascism dedicated to the salvation of the culture and national independence of peoples all over the world. One need hardly mention that the affirmation of one's national culture does not preclude the appreciation of universal spiritual attainments and a philosophy of internationalism.

Reading the reproaches addressed by American critics to their Soviet colleagues, particularly with regard to socialist realism and their contentions that our literary theory demands that only the positive aspects of Soviet life be depicted (really, we also publish books which reflect our shortcomings), I recall that America has an apologetic trend in her criticism. At the turn of the century, it was manifested in the trend of neo-humanism whose advocates opposed critical realism. One has only to point to Dreiser who was obliged to overcome so many difficulties before his work was finally acclaimed. In mid-century, there was a new stimulus to this trend. Donald Adams, in *The Shape of Books to Come* (1944), denounced critical realism, calling upon American literature to affirm the American way of life and its moral values. As far as I can tell, Donald Adams is now forgotten, although for almost twenty years he edited the *New York Times Book Review* and played an important part in literary politics, but who will deny that his principles continue to function as the guidelines for certain American critics.

It is interesting for a historian to observe the changes of values and criteria. Let us, for example, consider John

Macy's *The Spirit of American Literature*. In the section dealing with Henry James, this authoritative critic writes with great conviction at the turn of the century that "Mr. James is an American only in the sense that he was born and passed part of his youth in this country. For forty years he has lived in Europe and he does not know much about America. It is a visitor and not a native who writes *The American Scene*". Today, on the contrary, James' Americanism is beyond reproach. The same critic wrote, "Mr. James has two technical defects, one of style, the other of method." Ten years later, Joseph Warren Beach wrote his distinguished study *The Method of Henry James* (1918) and laid the foundations of an utterly new approach to the writer. Now James' method is acclaimed as a significant contribution to literature and the source of the writer's unique style which is particularly praise-worthy for its correspondence to the writer's chosen method.

This is one of many examples illustrating that criticism, like literature, evolves, undergoes transformations, and knows periods of decline and flowering. While the historian observing this process is not indifferent to events, he should, as I see it, be capable of visualizing the process as a whole and of making an extraordinarily accurate evaluation of that process. The judgements of certain American colleagues regarding our criticism show an astonishingly unhistorical approach and make no effort to try to comprehend what is happening in our country; they are also prejudiced in their analysis. We too have our faults. But wouldn't it be better to judge criticism and literary scholarship by the best rather than the worst examples?

I hope that the reader does not expect me to list everything I have read. Space alone precludes the treatment of all major American critics and of my own favorites among them. I am wary of mentioning the latter for fear of offending those who have been either overlooked by me or judged less favorably than they judge themselves. Despite the fact that we critics make a profession of evaluating the work of others, we are at times oversensitive to the slings and arrows that wound our own selfesteem.

It is hardly worthwhile to make a table of critics and grade each one. Far more important is the problem of principles which I will discuss in brief.

I will begin with the trend that is naturally closest to me. Marxist criticism was born in America during the twenties: a glib young movement, acutely topical, a bit too sociological and somewhat shaky with regard to aesthetic criteria. In the thirties, the Marxist philosophy became more widespread. Within the movement, close to the party, were many people professing Marxism; but people who had no affiliation with any political movement were also interested in this philosophy. During the forties, on the contrary, it was fashionable to criticize Marxism. This sort of criticism was begun by Edmund Wilson in his essay "Marxism and Literature", although he too had paid tribute to Marxism. Here he repented his sins and was forgiven by bourgeois criticism.

I will not quibble with Wilson's just observations regarding the limitations of a narrow sociological approach to literature. When he wrote this in 1938, we had already become aware of this ourselves and had criticized such tendencies. His reproaches were, accordingly, beside the point, because we had already made the point. His criticism was unjust because he completely ignored the works of Marxist critics who had escaped the pitfalls of dogmatism and were engaged in serious literary research. I hope that American specialists in Russian literature will admit that Soviet scholars have written works about our literature which both illuminate the literary process as a whole and give valuable insights into the work of individual writers. I for one often discover that American works dealing with Russian literature owe much to our scholars. Here I am not even speaking of Soviet scholarship in the field of Western literatures. Many of our works on classics of world literature are among the finest achievements of modern literary scholarship. Unfortunately most Western critics never discover this.

I agree that in the United States, Marxist criticism has not made substantial progress. But the books and essays

of John Howard Lawson, Sidney Finkelstein and G. LeRoy are of great scholarly value. Speaking of Marxist criticism in general, its significance goes beyond the limits of those circles politically affiliated with Marxist philosophy. For all his prejudices against the Marxist approach, John H. Raleigh was obliged to admit that Marxism "has enriched criticism and still enriches it. For the passionate sense of involvement in life, the response to human needs, the intense preoccupation with literature as a life force—all these elements have helped to keep criticism in our time away from its most enticing refuges, the ivory tower".¹ Marxist criticism is an international phenomenon and one should not judge it only by its American forms. On the whole, it is little known in America. From time to time a critic like Georgy Lucàcz is "discovered" but he basically belongs to a stage in Marxist scholarship that has already been passed, although he did play an important part in his time. Those who criticize Marxist criticism so lightly do so largely because of their own ignorance; the great majority of such criticism is written in a language unknown to American critics and judged by them on the basis of fragments of the great body of Marxist criticism produced in our country and in other socialist countries. If one is to make scholarly conclusions, one must have a thorough knowledge of one's subject.

The antipode of Marxist criticism is the "New Criticism" which declines to examine literature in its social, cultural and philosophical context. "New Critics" recognize only the work itself and concentrate their painstaking analyses on its literary features. Such criticism is not unfamiliar to us. Russia went through a phase of formalism in the twenties. I myself owe much to our formalist school: to Victor Shklovsky (I dedicated one of my books to him), Boris Eikhenbaum, Victor Zhirmunsky (a personal friend), and Yuri Tynyanov. What I did find new was the application of formalist principles of analysis to the classics of English literature and I was interested in reading books that applied methods of "New Criticism" to, for example, the works of Shakespeare.

I don't know whether American readers are familiar with a book by Robert Weimann, German Marxist and professor at Berlin's Humboldt University: *The New Criticism und die Bürgerliche Literaturwissenschaft*. He criticizes the methodology of this trend, noting the limitations of an immanent formal approach to literature. This does not mean that the possibility of such an approach is excluded. I found several anthologies to be of use: Cleanth Brooks and Austin Warren's *Understanding Poetry*, and C. Brooks' and R. Heilman's *Understanding Drama*. Among the masters of the "New Criticism", Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, R. P. Blackmur, W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and John Grove Ransom have discovered things in works that went unnoticed by previous readers, teaching us to read attentively, and recognize ambivalence; they have brought the reader closer to an understanding of essential factors in poetry. But critics of other persuasions than Marxism have also noticed the limitations of their approach to literature.

Most curious of all are the allegations to that effect made by another branch of literary formalism, the Chicago school of neo-Aristotelians whose members include R. McKeon, R. S. Crane, Wayne Booth and Elder Olson.

I was introduced to this school through Rene Wellek and Austin Warren's *The Theory of Literature* which gives the quintessence of the principles of formal analysis. Wimsatt and Brooks' *Literary Criticism: A Short History* shows how the formalist school conceives of the development of literary and critical thought, emphasizing those principles which most closely correspond to its own at various stages in this process.

Between the two poles of Marxism and formalism, one can find many types of criticism, leading to one or the other direction. I find that the traditions of cultural and historical criticism have been continued in the works of many American scholars and critics of this century. George Steiner's *Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky* is of particular interest to Russian readers for it deals with problems constantly discussed in our criticism. As a historian of dra-

ma, I was interested in his work *The Death of Tragedy* which is less helpful than it appears on first glance. I read with great attention the books of John Henry Raleigh, particularly his analysis of Eugene O'Neill's dramas. Other useful books on the history of American literature include Robert Spiller's *Literary History of the United States*, Phillip Hofman's *The Novel in America*, and R. Chase's *The Tradition of the American Novel*. I particularly enjoyed Maxwell Geismar's series of books on modern American literature. Both his methods of analysis and his conclusions strike as being extremely sound.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that I am not a Freudian. He will perhaps attribute this to my ignorance or to my Marxist convictions. I should mention, however, that during the twenties we too read a great deal of Freud, whose works were published here in an almost complete edition; we had our own Freudians who applied his principles to the works of Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy. I am not one to underestimate the importance of the sexual aspect of life, but it seems to me that psychoanalysis is called for only in cases where one finds a true anomaly in the works of a given writer, and that it should not be allowed to crowd out the actual problems of the work. I was not impressed by Norman Holland's psychological analysis of Shakespeare, or by the analysis of his teachers: Freud and Ernest Jones. Lionell Trilling attempted to find a middle ground in evaluating the significance of Freud's teachings for literature. I find it somewhat more limited than he does.

Far more interesting to me is the mythological school that has a broader view of human consciousness and subconsciousness and researches the historical roots of human behavior, emotions and moral concepts. Following in the footsteps of C. G. Jung American critics studied the collective subconscious, searching for its incarnation in myths. Northrope Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism*, the movement's Bible, attempts to artificially reduce literary development to one principle, but it does contain some interesting observations. The most convincing discovery

of this school is the revelation of the mythological foundations and ritual forms in classical works of art. Francis Fergusson does this far more elegantly than Herbert Weisinger. And one cannot deny the influence of this school on modern literature, particularly with regard to the renaissance of ritualism in dramatic art.

Closely related is the symbolic school based on the teachings of German philosopher Ernst Cassirer on symbolic forms and applied to literature and art by Susan Langer. Like its mythological counterpart, this school gives absolute credence to one element of the creative consciousness, applying it to the whole sphere of literature; naturally enough this results in a certain one-sidedness. One can find typical examples in the anthology *Interpretations of American Literature* edited by Charles Feidelson and Paul Brodtkorb (1959). Here one finds that not only Melville, but Hawthorne, Poe, Thoreau and even Hemingway are symbolists. Isolated observations made by the authors of the essays collected here struck me as being more convincing than their generalizations. I was most impressed by Harry Levin's essay "Symbolism and the Novel" in the collection *The Contexts of Criticism* (1958). While I am firmly resolved to conceal my favorites among American critics, I cannot help but admit that Harry Levin is one scholar who is particularly easy for me to understand.

I say this because so much stands between Soviet and American critics: world outlook, traditions, academic schools, literary and aesthetic movements. Sometimes one reads the works of some authors as though they were written by inhabitants of another planet, and sometimes one finds readily understandable the thought and approaches of others, despite discrepancies in outlook and conclusions. More than one of the critics discussed here appeals to me. But I cannot begin to name all those whom I have read and am reading. The reader may lament the fact that many of the critics mentioned here are not *au courant*. Some works have become classics, others gradually disappear from the lists of literature supplemented

by new names and books. Alas, Susan Sontag and Norman Podhoretz are already part of the older generation.

I follow new critical phenomena as closely as I can; sometimes I leaf through new textbooks on American literature which show what critical approaches have become generally accepted; I read the *New York Review of Books* and enjoy the polemics, which reawaken my love for paradoxes. If I do not mention the most recent talents, it is partially because I simply cannot manage to keep up with the rapidly changing American critical scene, and partially deliberately. McLuhan, semiotics, and structuralism deserve attention. But what can a man who belongs to an old generation, who was nurtured on the critical movements of the first half of the twentieth century, say about these trends? It is sufficient that we are more or less aware of the work of those young writers who now "make" criticism. We can hardly catch up with them and it would be foolish to try, for we are accustomed to thinking in a different way and it is already too late to change this. I say this because every young generation is inclined to speak slightly disparagingly of its immediate predecessors whose weaknesses somehow become particularly apparent. I don't know if I have managed to convey my great interest in American criticism which, particularly in the 20th century, proved informative, innovative, ample and diverse. It gives excellent food for thought. And if I express my own objections it is only because I am defending myself against the allegations of my American colleagues who say that we have no individual point of view, by expressing my own. I enjoy meeting people who do not agree with me. I am interested in the way other people think. One can learn many lessons from this while, nevertheless, retaining one's own integrity.

NOTES

¹ *The Development of American Literary Criticism*, ed. by Floyd Stovall, Chapel Hill, 1955, p. 210.

II

B. GILSON

**A SOCIALIST OF THE EMOTIONS:
UPTON SINCLAIR***

One of Upton Sinclair's last works, his *Autobiography* (1962), contains an unusual photograph: we see the 85-year-old writer, a spry old man in a checkered shirt, standing next to a pyramid that exceeds him in height and is made up of volumes that he himself wrote. There are close to a hundred books translated into 60 languages: novels and plays, anthologies and treatises, sociological and publicistic studies, philosophical and political works. His legacy is as imposing, as it is diverse; one would be hard put to find a genre in which this man of irrepressible energy and encyclopaedic interests did not work. Shaw's words from a letter he wrote to the author of *The Jungle* are often quoted: "When people ask me what has happened in my long lifetime, I do not refer to the newspaper files ... but to your (Upton Sinclair's—*Ed.*) novels."¹

And here a paradox seems to arise: Sinclair's tremendous fame among the general reading public stands in striking contrast to the attitude of contempt assumed by serious academic criticism, which regards him as a sociologist and journalist who encroached upon the world of belles-lettres and in the process, as it were, mercilessly

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sacrificed aesthetic criteria to a straightforward propagandistic cause.

Just what was Upton Sinclair? A boring advocate of a boring puritanical future, as Walter Lippmann thought, a purveyor of popular belletristic sociology completely devoid of artistic significance? Or a writer in his own right, a representative of the "literature of protest" who in his own way foresaw certain literary tendencies of our age?

We are inclined toward the second point of view. Without forgetting his errors and inadequacies, we view him as a writer of the new type. The most perspicacious of his contemporaries recognized this. George Bernard Shaw, who supported Sinclair's nomination for the Nobel Prize, wrote that he was "the militant author with a social conscience, whose pen is a weapon",² and that his "literary graces are not ends in themselves, but only bait to catch readers for their ideas. . .".³ In trying to define Upton Sinclair's originality, so shrewd a critic as Van Wyck Brooks called him a representative of a particular category of "publicistic writer".

Sinclair's role and significance become particularly apparent when we place him in the ranks of such twentieth century intellectual enlighteners as Shaw, France, Thomas Mann, Brecht and Wells; Sinclair himself felt an intellectual and artistic affinity with the latter. In this broad and naturally heterogeneous intellectual and stylistic movement, which in its own way revived the traditions of the 18th century Enlightenment under new historical conditions, Upton Sinclair took his place as a specifically American writer, practical and business-like in his outlook; as such he did much to help others understand his country, the more so because shrewd publicistic trends and an interest in sociology were already part of the American literary tradition. In his books we feel the passion of teaching, the call to action and reforms, the search for the newest, most practical and decisive forms of enlightenment which in the final analysis enrich the possibilities of art. In this light it should be noted that Upton Sinclair acted with greater cogency and penetration when he un-

masked the evils of society than when he worked as a social reformer advancing a positive program.

Of course in the "literature of protest", that specifically American phenomenon, Upton Sinclair had his own special role to play. In the end his criticism was directed not against personal flaws, but rather against the system of private ownership as a whole. And if this "cry for justice" ran through all his books, then the strength of his appeal was in many respects determined by the fact that the unjust order of things was underscored for him by another, socialistic alternative.

The treatment of socialism as an ideal for society lies at the foundation of Upton Sinclair's best, most mature novels, those which define the meaning and spirit of his creative work.

And Sinclair was not alone in this respect. Socialism for him was a sign of the times. The period immediately preceding the First World War was marked by a rapid growth of interest in the workers' theme on the part of various writers. In 1914 Sinclair Lewis, who was then a young writer, published an essay called "Relation of the Novel to the Present Social Unrest: the Passing of Capitalism". In it Upton Sinclair, together with Dreiser, London, Herrick, H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, Bennet and others, is characterized as a "thoughtful writer of to-day".⁴ He is counted among those who see behind the individual dramas of their characters the background of "a coming struggle which shall threaten the very existence of this status called capitalism".⁵

But Upton Sinclair never thought in strictly scientific Marxist terms. Utopian notions borrowed from Bellamy, Spencer's evolutionism and a certain idealism arising from a belief in the efficacy of emotional appeal—all these things "coexisted" in his consciousness. Later it became clear that Sinclair underestimated the class activeness of workers and of the Communist workers' party.

In his essay "British Pacifism and the British Dislike of Theory" V. I. Lenin correctly determined the nature of the internal contradictions inherent to Sinclair as an

artist and ideologist. In analyzing Sinclair's brochure *Socialism and War* and the response written by the right-wing socialist Blatchford, Lenin very aptly called Sinclair a socialist of the emotions without any theoretical training.⁶

In this sense Upton Sinclair's importance can be more accurately judged in the light of history. He was not an eccentric loner or a reincarnated Don Quixote. He must be viewed within that tradition, both ideological and literary, which was organically American. In response to those who stubbornly sought to prove that socialist ideas were "contraindicated" for Americans, that as a "foreign import" they were diametrically opposed to the traditional national spirit, Upton Sinclair wrote: "Even in the midst of our pioneer individualism there were Americans who dreamed of an ordered society based upon justice. We had our Brook Farm and a score of other colonies nearly a hundred years ago. We had our native Socialist movement, with leaders such as Albert Brisbane and Horace Greeley and Wendell Phillips and Frances Willard and Edward Bellamy—and so on down to Gene Debs and Jack London. All these were native Americans who spoke our language."⁷

The critic Fay M. Blake in his book *The Strike in the American Novel* (1972) shows how extensively the theme of confrontation between labor and capital is reflected in American literature (the author cites close to 240 novels published before 1945 that deal with this theme) and comes to a similar conclusion: "Interest in Socialism . . . had a relatively long history among American intellectuals, beginning in the Eighteen Forties with early Socialist experiments like the New Harmony and Brook Farm."⁸ And in reality, from the very inception of American society ideas of utopian socialism attracted many fervent followers. America was a unique testing ground where they could confirm their theories. Among the followers of Robert Owen was O. Brownson, author of the famous treatise "Essay on the Working Classes" (1837); he was one of the first writers to draw attention to the sorry

plight of workers. Fourier's ideas were ardently propagandized by A. Brisbane and Horace Greeley, who were later joined by P. Godwin, C. Dana, W. E. Channing and others connected with Brook Farm. Despite the fact that utopian colonies were short-lived, the activity of the first American socialists had a noticeable impact on generations of Americans.

Upton Sinclair resembled these pioneers of American socialism in his craving for social justice and his desire to see the practical implementation of reform. In 1906 he formed the cooperative colony "Helicon Hall"; later he came out with his well-known plan EPIC (End Poverty In California) (1934). The position of romantic writers toward utopian socialism was more complex. Thus in his late novel *The Crater, or Vulcan's Peak* (1847) Cooper disputed the notion that America was the Promised Land and expressed his distrust in the ability of Fourier's theories to bring about equality. In *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), which reflected Hawthorne's experiences at Brook Farm, the failure of the utopian experiment was verified: for the author reformers were people with noble and idealistic aspirations but they were impractical and naive in their methods for "renovating" the world. Melville, who in his own way responded to the intellectual conflicts of the 1840s, constructed his Rousseau-like stories *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) on the crucial opposition of the "natural state" to "industrial civilization" replete with vice. In *Mardi* (1849), a work saturated with allegories and complex symbolism, a rejection of American and European civilization is combined with an affirmation of the principles of universal brotherhood. And finally Henry David Thoreau's rejection of collective activity as just another type of regimentation, another "bridle", as well as his rejection of all forms of government, constitutes his attempt to defend the ideal of the free individual living outside society. In essence this represents an aspiration toward the future classless society.

On the whole the romantic writers, while disapproving of the methods used by the utopian reformers, none-

theless were unanimous in their criticism of a society governed by the principles of private ownership and capitalistic progress. In contrast to it, often in the spirit of transcendentalism, they posited not so much a concrete form of social organization as a moral and ethical ideal based on the principles of the independence of the individual, equality, and spiritual freedom. Emerson "did obeisance" before the nobleness of the first socialists and their elevated goals, and wrote of "benevolent socialism" which he saw as a "good sign".

In conversations with his executor Horace Traubel, the ageing Walt Whitman said that while he did not accept the doctrine of class struggle, he could not help but welcome the ultimate exalted goals of the socialists; it is not surprising that Whitman was so popular in Soviet Russia during the first years of the revolution, and Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet People's Commissar of Education, called him "a prophetic figure standing at the entrance to the new world".

This literary stream never ran dry. In that "religion of solidarity" defended by Edward Bellamy, one of Upton Sinclair's forerunners, one can feel the influence of Whitman's ethics. His celebrated utopian novel *Looking Backward* (1887), which describes the America of the year 2000 as a nation of universal prosperity, socialist in its essence, was perceived not only as a work of art, but also as a practical program for action.

And in fact the author of *Looking Backward* did prove to be a powerful stimulus for the social utopian strivings of American writers (Mark Twain in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, I. Donnelly in *Caesar's Column*, Jack London in *Iron Heel*). After Heymarket affair William Dean Howells turned his face toward "the other America" in his "Altrurian dilogy" (*A Traveller from Altruria*, 1894 and *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 1907) projecting the future and ridiculing the present social order; in so doing he was following in Bellamy's footsteps and depicting a society that had overcome class inequality and established economic democracy. The uto-

pian line in literature weakened considerably under the new historical conditions that emerged at the beginning of our century; reality rather than dreams of the future began to attract writers. The social evil which was the main object of argument for Bellamy's and Howells' heroes now appeared as vivid, living scenes in the works of realists—Dreiser, London, Upton Sinclair. In comparing *Looking Backward* with *The Jungle*, Jack London had good reason to view the first as "beautiful theoretics" and the second as something "written with sweat and blood and groans and tears".⁹

Upton Sinclair's literary debut coincided with the rise of the workers' and socialist movement, with widespread agitation for reform, with the struggle against the domination of the trusts. Turning again to Fay M. Blake we read: "In the period just before World War I Socialist ideas had had a fresh spirit of growth and influence. . . . The artist who felt and could articulate his discontent with capitalist values looked to socialism as a possible way out. Writers of many different political persuasions were exploring the subsurface injustices of capitalistic society with increasing disillusionment. . . . Socialism seemed to offer the possibility to create a new and equalitarian society."¹⁰

At the beginning of the 1900s Upton Sinclair authored many superficial works, books "churned out" mostly to make money (which made him develop a sort of shorthand), and a few serious novels: *King Midas*, *The Journal of Arthur Stirling*, *Manassas*. But only his celebrated *The Jungle* ended up being a truly "Sinclairian" work. In it he turned to the "heavy sword of facts", groping and finding that sphere of life whose depiction would be associated with his major accomplishments; that sphere of life was the relation between labor and capital. The novel did not merely draw a local picture of the scandalously unsanitary conditions in the meat-packing industry (as some critics thought); *The Jungle* provided a strong impetus for the development of a new genre which achieved general recognition; the critic Randolph Bourne

called it the "sociological novel". Sometimes Sinclair was accused of sensationalism. In *The Jungle*, however, we only see a characteristic trait—the desire to depict social evil in its most dramatic forms. Sinclair drew a picture of "wage slavery", in Jack London's words, in its worst form. And here the novelist was utterly concrete and trustworthy.

Upton Sinclair's novels are rich in information—if not about man himself and his psychology, then about the social and economic conditions in which he lives. In *The Jungle* the author acquaints us with industrial technology, a sphere of life which, because of its "unaesthetic" aspects, was treated only unwillingly in literature. Yet this exceptionally prosaic story by Sinclair genuinely attracts the reader.

And here Sinclair shows himself to be a true American! After all, his fellow countrymen and colleagues of the writing profession were drawn by the practical, everyday side of life. In his "Song of the Broad-Axe" Whitman sang the glories of work as something inseparable from the romantic existence of the pioneer. In *Martin Eden* Jack London acquainted his readers with the process of literary creation; later, in *Arrowsmith*, Sinclair Lewis led us into the laboratory of a research biologist, capturing the moment when his scientific idea is born. Dreiser's Cowperwood stands out not only as a lady-killer, but also as a tireless financier engaged in concrete, practical work. As far as Upton Sinclair is concerned, he dared to encroach upon the world of industrial production, as evidenced in his description of miners and their work in *King Coal* and drilling for "black gold" in *Oil!* For Sinclair the slaughter-houses acquire a symbolic significance as the incarnation of that unjust system which the author described metaphorically with devastating accuracy as the jungle.

Need forces the hero himself to descend lower and lower; his soul is destroyed. In defending the honor of his wife he ends up in jail, is deprived of work, and is transformed into a hobo, "scab". Here the novel deals

with the same theme of the "lower depths" which would resound with particular force in the literature of the "red thirties", in the works of Edward Dahlberg, Nelson Algren, James Farrell and other writers of the Chicago school. But this abyss of despair is lightened by a ray of hope. Eventually new prospects dawn before Jurgis and then before Sinclair's other heroes who have with difficulty grasped the truth about society. Jurgis comes to a meeting of socialists, hears the fiery speech of the orator and acquires a vital, new faith in socialism. But this spiritual turning point in the hero's life lacks sufficient motivation; it is announced, but not revealed in all its complexity precisely as a process involving the birth of a new level of consciousness. The new Jurgis lacks flesh and blood. For Sinclair this would continue to be a characteristic flaw.

Many years have passed, of course, since the appearance of *The Jungle*, and in that time labor conditions and the worker's life as described by Sinclair have changed. Does this mean that the novel is now totally obsolete? Of course not. One cannot help but agree with Harvey Swados who, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1961, compared *The Jungle* with another outstanding work, Zola's *Germinal*: "Both books were the products of men who proceeded, notebook in hand, to research a new territory and then retired to write, not in tranquility, but in the heat of anger and hope, about the price paid by countless thousands to build what is known as a civilization. Zola's brutalized coal miners of Northern France and Sinclair's immigrants of Chicago's Packingtown can nevermore be fully forgotten. They take their place in history. . . ." ¹¹ Though we are living under different historical conditions, Sinclair's book, in Swados' opinion, will never lose its significance: *The Jungle* must with renewed force capture the imagination of a totally new generation of readers.

The Jungle and Sinclair's subsequent works, all written in the same aesthetic key, graphically revealed the strong and weak aspects of the "sociological novel" based

on a number of definite artistic and intellectual principles. Sociological "reconnaissance" preceded the writing of the book, the writer turned into a reporter, a "muck-raker", a collector of facts designed to strike a given target.

As a fighter for justice Sinclair was impatient. Like a sensitive seismograph he registered the first tremors of social upheaval and rushed to respond to them. His sympathies and antipathies were usually expressed openly and decisively; but his books also contain sentimentality, the motif of martyrdom (Jurgis, Jimmie Higgins, Paul Atkins in *Oil!*, Sacco and Vanzetti in *Boston*) and a burning faith in a bright, new tomorrow. Once, reflecting subtly on his own novels, he said he saw in them "Shelly's content expressed in a form inherent to Zola".

As a rule the principle heroes in Sinclair's novels, those around whom the action revolves, are dynamic, depicted in motion, in the process of ideational and moral development, freeing themselves of their illusions and acquiring a new understanding of the world. Such is the principle typology of Sinclair's characters: Allen Montagu, Jurgis, Thyrsis, Samuel, Sylvia, Hal Warner, Jimmie Higgins, Banny Ross, Rudy Messer and many others.

In treating his characters Sinclair proceeded from a rather literally interpreted principle of determinism: his heroes directly represent definite social forces and illustrate the operation of economic laws; this led to a certain schematization of character, to the predominance of social and class traits presented close-up, and to the leveling of individual personal traits.

Like Dos Passos and Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair was part of that literary current which chose to depict "economic man". At the other end of the spectrum were the writers of the psychological school who examined man's personality, often isolated, it seemed, from society and social ties.

But this sociological bent in Sinclair's novels was compensated for by the indisputable art of the narrator, who was able to fashion a fascinating plot; still it is also true

that in Sinclair's style (the writer at times relied on a stenographer to help him) one could note what Van Wyck Brooks called a fatal glibness.

In essence the sociological novel of Upton Sinclair at its best was a particular variety of the "socialistic tendentious novel" which Engels was writing about back in the 1880s. Engels saw as its task to conscientiously represent real relationships, to dispel dominating illusions and official optimism, to plant doubts regarding the permanence of the bases of the existing order.

It is significant that side by side with the sociological novel in Sinclair's works (and the problems of art, love and marriage were by no means alien to him) there also developed another type of novel in a romantic key which tended to deal with domestic moral problems (*The Journal of Arthur Stirling*, 1903; *Samuel, the Seeker*, 1910; *Pilgrimage of Love*, 1911; *Sylvia*, 1913; *Sylvia's Marriage*, 1914). But in spite of the absorbing stories told in these novels, Sinclair was here not quite so true to himself as in *The Jungle* and *King Coal*.

He was most convincing when he shifted from the world of romanticism and abstract speculation to the world of reality, where he spoke as an unmasker of evil. In the novels *Metropolis* (1907) and *The Moneychangers* (1908), both of them artistically bland works, the author condemns the senseless luxury and extravagance of New York high society. Sinclair's indignation over the "easy life" of the rich was engendered by his keen realization that this was a manifestation of profound class discrimination. The genuine sympathy of the writer toward those located at the bottom of the social pyramid found expression in his celebrated anthology *The Cry for Justice* (1915), which included a passionate preface by Jack London.

King Coal (1917) continued this line of development; here real historical facts—a strike in Colorado in the spring of 1914—undergo artistic transformation. As in *The Jungle* Sinclair is accurate in his depiction of industrial processes—in this case the work of miners; at the

same time his novel conveys a tremendous sense of outrage in its depiction of wage slavery in its most undisguised form.

The novel's uniqueness lies in the fact that the events portrayed are often viewed through the eyes of the hero, a sort of figure new for Sinclair: he is not a searching intellectual or a suffering proletarian, but a rich man who isolates himself, if only temporarily, from his own class and is full of sympathy for the working man. And his Hal Warner is more alive and real than such predecessors as Allen Montagu in *Metropolis* and *The Money-changers*.

It is notable that in *King Coal* the author does not believe simply in calls for mercy addressed to those who hold power in this world; the head-on collision of classes depicted in the novel in the form of a strike brought to mind once again the new theme as it began to hold greater and greater sway, not only over the literary periphery (as it seemed at the time) but also over "serious" literature; it was echoed in the works of such writers as W. D. Howells (*A Hazard of New Fortunes*), Dreiser (*Sister Carrie*), Jack London (*Iron Heel*, *Valley of the Moon*), Ernest Poole (*The Harbor*), Sherwood Anderson (*Marching Men*, *Poor White*) and Sinclair Lewis (*Babbitt*).

The depiction of class struggle did not impoverish the stock of available literary options; rather it enriched it, making it possible to reveal the fate of the individual in a broad social context and expanding the narrow framework of the novel as it had taken shape in the 19th century. Pictures of the poverty and suffering of the masses and of industrial production became objects of aesthetic perception as legitimate as love, journeys, adventures and other favorite subjects. Upton Sinclair was not alone in this respect. The aesthetic treatment of the world of poverty, labor and capital could be observed in many other realists of the time: Galsworthy alone is sufficient evidence of this. The worker came to be recognized as a hero as fit for literature as a typical member of the middle

class. But for Sinclair the very treatment of the proletarian in art underwent a change. Instead of the poor, oppressed man who could evoke only compassion there appeared the image of a fighter. Thus the way was prepared for the rise of the "strike" novel which marked the 1930s.

The decade following the end of World War I, when Sinclair began associating with radical Left circles, also proved to be a fruitful period for the man as an artist. The events taking place in Russia, the socialist revolution of 1917 in particular, attracted his undivided attention. He was one of those Americans who condemned the intervention against the new socialist state.

His famous novel *Jimmie Higgins* (1919), the publication of which had world-wide impact, was the first response in American literature to the Russian revolution. On the whole Sinclair is more convincing here than in *The Jungle* when he traces the growth and development of an heroic personality, telling the story of an ordinary American worker and socialist party functionary. Jimmie perceives the Bolshevik victory in Russia as the embodiment of his life-long aspirations. "Jimmie was now in the seventh heaven," we read, "walking as if on air. A proletarian government at last, the first in history!"

The closing chapters of the novel are full of dramatic tension. Having undergone ideological brainwashing, Jimmie becomes a soldier: he is still inclined to believe that in fighting the Kaiser he is "saving the world for democracy" and helping the Soviet state. But he begins to "see the light" on the front at Archangelsk when he falls under the influence of the revolutionary agitation carried out by the Bolshevik Kalinkin; after all, Jimmie isn't carrying the red membership card of the socialist party just for show. He begins to distribute Bolshevik tracts; here Sinclair is relying on real facts involving the American expeditionary forces. Higgins is arrested and ordered to reveal who his accomplices are, but even under torture he remains silent. At this moment he feels his solidarity with suffering and fighting mankind. This depiction of Higgins displays once again a typical flaw in

Sinclair's writing—the tendency to replace a living portrayal with something publicistic (including the novel's denouement) combined with an equal tendency to over-accentuate the motif of martyrdom. But at the same time the hero bears the stamp of his times and through him the author documents a most significant tendency involving a simple man's shift to a position of revolutionary action. In this sense Sinclair's novel, which was greeted ecstatically by Eugene Debs, Romain Rolland and others, was consonant with the works of Barbusse, Rolland, Nexø and Sinclair's own fellow countryman John Reed.

The First World War and the October Revolution which "shook the world" broadened Sinclair's social horizons and permitted him to see America's critical problems in a new light. And this forced the author to search for a new artistic form which would be more efficient and effective. That form proved to be the publicistic sociological pamphlet. These were arranged in an entire series called *The Dead Hand*, which demonstrates to what extent Sinclair outgrew the "muckrakers". In his "four volumes making a work of revolutionary criticism, an Economic Interpretation of Culture", the writer was not searching for individual culprits, as his fellow muckrakers had done; rather he accused big business as a whole, showing how its deadening palm covered all aspects of national life.

In these satirical pamphlets Sinclair makes a broad frontal attack on social evil: he unmasks the dependence of the church on financial interests ("The Profits of Religion", 1918), the graft infesting the "free" press ("The Brass Check", 1920), the degradation of writers as a result of their submission to the almighty dollar ("The Mammonart", 1922), and the debasement of art, its transformation into a commercial pseudo-culture ("Money Writes!", 1927). Nor does he ignore such spheres of national life as education. In "The Goslings" (1922) he criticizes the ideological brainwashing which American children undergo, and in "The Goose-Step" (1923) he attacks the "invisible government", i.e., big business and

its control over the universities. He is concerned not only with social problems, but also with those of a personal nature; in "The Book of Life" he submits his prescription for human improvement and perfection.

Upton Sinclair's satirical pamphlets not only disturbed those who read them; they paved the way for a new literary genre in documentary form, serving as models of the fusion of sociology and publicistic writing in essay form. This genre underwent considerable development in the nineteen thirties, a period which witnessed a veritable explosion of nonfiction literature as practised by Dreiser, Caldwell, Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank and others. Writing satirical pamphlets sharpened Sinclair's perceptions in the field of sociology.

In the series of novels he wrote in the post-war decade one can see how the writer gained greater mastery over his material. In these works the lives of his heroes unfold against a broad social background; at the same time each novel—and this feature in some ways recalls Zola—takes us on a "journey" through some particular sphere of American life, but not just an ordinary journey.

100% is denunciatory through and through, and its hero, Peter Gudge, a typical provocateur, a "24 carat" patriot and former worker who out of material need enters the service of his masters and becomes a spy; in *Oil!* on the other hand, we witness once again the bright perspectives associated with the motif of "conversion" which Sinclair is so fond of. The plot centers on the life of Banny Ross (a distant precursor of Lanny Budd), the son of an oil magnate, who recognizes the truth of socialism. It is significant that next to the sympathetic figure of the "left-leaning" Ross there appears Paul Atkins, a new type of character for Sinclair. He receives the torch, as it were, from Jimmie Higgins. But as a literary creation he is manifestly pale by comparison; in general Sinclair had more success with victimized heroes that evoke compassion than with heroic fighters. But what is important here is that Paul Atkins, like Ernita in Dreiser's story of the same name, represents one of the first attempts to portray

a communist in American literature. Atkins heralds a new type of hero, the fighter, who would gain ascendancy in the literature of the "red thirties" (Wright, Rice, Steinbeck, Maltz and others).

In *Boston* (1928) we see the sociological novel developing into a new genre which would come to dominate in the last period of Sinclair's creative life: the "contemporary historical novel". For the writer this was a new development—in his earlier works no genuinely historical figures had appeared. In *Boston* he painted a rich social panorama of American society drawn into the struggle surrounding the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti. All this material is "cemented" in place with the help of a characteristic figure in Sinclair's typology, a representative of the powers that be who divorces himself from his class; that figure here is Cornelia, widow of the late head of the extremely rich Thornwell family, who together with her granddaughter Betty becomes involved in the battle to save Sacco and Vanzetti.

Sinclair is successful in his portrayal of these two heroes, the victims of a frame-up. He draws a humane and attractive picture of Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a modest fish trader, a kind and poetic man who loves Dante; Sacco is strikingly portrayed as a gloomy man sometimes given over to moments of despair. The story of their last hours and their death in the electric chair is told with genuine concern and forcefulness.

In the nineteen twenties Upton Sinclair became the most widely-read American writer in Soviet Russia, and there were profound reasons for this popularity. He felt a strong affinity to Russian literature, whose humanistic spirit and drive to expose the evils of society attracted him. He was well acquainted with Gogol, Turgenev and Dostoyevsky, but Tolstoy was especially dear to him. Shortly after the appearance of *The Jungle* he sent a copy to Yasnaya Polyana (Tolstoy's estate) with a dedicatory inscription. Tolstoy made the following note in his diary: "A marvellous book. The author is a specialist on the life of the working man. Exposes the shortcomings in all as-

pects of American life. I don't know where life is better." He added, "Should be published in Russian. . . ."

Later, in 1960, when the whole world marked the fiftieth anniversary of Tolstoy's death, Upton Sinclair sent an essay to *Pravda* in which he spoke excitedly about how much he had learned from Tolstoy the writer, the citizen, the truth-seeker. His attraction to Tolstoy as an unmasker of evil explains in large measure the nature of Sinclair's own creative work. Romain Rolland, who also never ceased to delight in Tolstoy's genius, felt this affinity between the Russian writer and Sinclair; in his review of *Jimmie Higgins* he wrote, "No novel of this time is nearer to the art and the spirit of Tolstoy."

In 1912 Sinclair and Maxim Gorky began corresponding; their relations were very friendly. Gorky, who actively promoted the publication of Sinclair in Russia, told the American writer in 1923, "*100%* has been published by Vsemirnaya Literatura Publishers as *Jimmie* was. *Jimmie* is a beautiful piece and well received in Russia. Your writing gets better and better all the time—I congratulate you with all my heart." Lunacharsky called Sinclair "one of the great favorites of our reading public". He added, "Countless copies of his works have been bought out here."

In an interview given to Louise Bryant, John Reed's widow, in the fall of 1920, Lenin's wife N. K. Krupskaya expressed a high opinion of *Jimmie Higgins*, and Sinclair promptly sent her a number of his other works. In V. I. Lenin's personal library in the Kremlin one can find six of Sinclair's novels with dedicatory inscriptions written by the author.

In a letter to Lenin dated January 5, 1921, A. Lunacharsky expressed his conviction that Lenin would take pleasure in reading *Jimmie Higgins*. We know that V. I. Lenin and N. K. Krupskaya read *Higgins* in the English original. It was translated into Russian on Lunacharsky's initiative. Between 1924 and 1927 Sinclair's *Collected Works* in eighteen volumes were published in Russia; the novels *Sylvia*, *100%* and *King Coal* were

adapted for the stage. A scenario based on *Jimmie Higgins*, written by the well-known Soviet writer Isaac Babel, was filmed at the Odessa film studio in 1929, and a stage production of the novel ran successfully at the Ukrainian Berezhil Theatre. The leading role was superbly played by the outstanding Ukrainian actor Ambrosy Buchma. The writer's works were the object of constant attention; his works were often discussed in readers' conferences and discussion groups, especially in proletarian circles composed of people thirsting eagerly for knowledge. In 1931 there was even published in Pasadena a small brochure describing the discussions about Sinclair's novels which were held in metalworkers' clubs in Leningrad.

Upton Sinclair in turn sympathetically followed the development of film, theatre and literature in the new Russia. In his brochure "Socialism and Culture" he expressed his conviction that only in a society where social justice reigned could art overcome its debasing dependence on money and serve the needs of working men. The cultural revolution in Russia convinced him of this.

In April 1932, Sinclair wrote a letter to A. B. Khalatov, the director of Gosizdat (State Publishing House) in Moscow, in which he said: "For the past fifteen years I have had in mind a novel portraying the activities of Americans in the Russian revolution. I knew John Reed very well, and Albert Rhys Williams, and Hal Ware, and many others are old friends of mine. I could not write about Russians, but I can write about Americans in Russia, and I think it is a great theme, and some day I hope to send you a worthwhile book."¹² These plans, however, were never realized.

In 1931, when the famous Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein (who gained world renown following the triumph of his film *The Battleship Potemkin*) arrived in Hollywood, Upton Sinclair contacted him and subsidized an expedition of Eisenstein's film crew to Mexico; the outcome of their work, *¡Que Viva Mexico!*, unfortunately was never completed; but the fragments which have been

preserved are distinguished for their aesthetic merit and are used in film schools in the United States.

The subsequent development of Upton Sinclair, the "socialist of the emotions", confirmed Lenin's perspicacious epithet: contradictions, unevenness in his creative evolution and oscillation appeared ever more frequently in the last decades of Sinclair's life. The crisis which shook America in 1929 followed by the great depression obviously confused the writer. The novels he wrote during this period (*Mountain City*, 1930; *Roman Holidays*, 1931) clearly lack the artistic strength of his early works; they are pale and devoid of expressive force. Sinclair's prescription for the peaceful transformation of American society as expressed in his EPIC plan (1934) revealed his naiveté. And his defense of the illusory idea of class co-operation in the novel *CO-OP* (1936) resulted in a work that is frankly one of his weakest.

But as had often happened in the past, the social upheaval in the mid-nineteen thirties stimulated the creative renewal that Sinclair needed. Joseph North, editor of *New Masses*, a gathering point for radical writers in the thirties, quotes the significant words of Thomas Wolfe, who in reviewing his own recent statements regarding the "independence" of the writer from "politics", now announced, "I think that almost every great poet and every great writer who ever wrote and whose works we all love has been on the side of the oppressed, the suffering, the confused and stricken of the earth. Do you know of a single exception to this?"¹³ Upton Sinclair was certainly no exception. The best works of his late period were inspired by an active hatred of fascism.

Of course in the story *No pasaran!* (1937), an early response to the events taking place in Spain, the treatment is cursory and the battle scenes are obviously drawn with naiveté. But still the story was surprisingly timely, fervently advocating the idea of a united anti-fascist front. Not without a certain schematic straightforwardness, but true in all essentials, Sinclair recorded those shifts in the frame of mind of Americans which were oc-

casioned by the "danger of the brownshirts"; these shifts were personified in the figure of Rudy Messer, an inexperienced youth who recognizes the justice of the anti-fascist struggle, and the socialist Izzy Bloch, who dreams of changing the world through moderate, civil means and becomes a soldier, and the communist Larry Adams, who sets aside his disagreements with the socialists when facing their common enemy. In his own way Sinclair expressed the profound historicism, the concept of "historical necessity" (to use John Howard Lawson's phrase), which characterized radical literature in the thirties, as evidenced in Dos Passos' trilogy *U.S.A.*, Josephine Herbst's trilogy on the Trexler family, Dreiser's *Trilogy of Desire*, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and other works. The conception of modern times as a natural culmination of a definite historical process lies at the foundation of Sinclair's *The Flivver King* (1937), a work as forceful as a harsh satirical pamphlet. Penetrating the inner sanctums of the Ford empire, Sinclair unmasked the anti-semitism, red baiting, phoney traditionalism and "home breeding" of the "flivver king"; he also detected new trends, the birth of a new generation of rebels as personified in the union activist Tom Shutt.

The stormy social upheavals of the thirties further convinced the writer that the fate of men was unalterably linked to the broad stream of history. Now he no longer limited himself to "American soil", but rather broadened his literary horizons to include the vast panorama of Europe. The epic of Lanny Budd is a unique chronicle of the period. The first volumes encompass the period from the beginning of the First World War to Hitler's coming to power, including the revolt in Spain and the fall of France. Here events are viewed from a certain historical distance. Beginning with the sixth volume, *A World to Win*, Sinclair is writing concurrently with the fiery events taking place in the world.

This enormous canvas, in which fiction is fused with fact, came to be for Sinclair a new experiment in the "contemporary historical novel" as modelled on *Boston*

and *The Flivver King*. The series about Lanny Budd clearly manifests a tendency toward epic breadth and scope, a tendency that resulted in the proliferation of cycles of novels in twentieth century American literature (recall Dos Passos, Sinclair Lewis, Faulkner, Wolfe, and Farrell).

Sinclair's cycle revolves around the travels and adventures of Lanny Budd, the illegitimate son of a Connecticut millionaire, industrialist and gunrunner. Thanks to his wealth and international ties Budd gains access to the world of powerful men; he shows up in Paris and Rome, Berlin and Moscow. Events and people are woven around him, thus tying all the material together in a way so often favored by Sinclair. At the beginning of the thirties we find Budd working as a secret agent for President Roosevelt; he penetrates the fascist lair and while pretending to be a friend of the nazis commits daring acts, including the stealing of secret documents. During World War II Budd is sent on a mission to the USSR, and then as a war correspondent he finds himself with the Allied troops in North Africa and Italy, and, after the opening of the second front, in France and Belgium. On the eve of his untimely death President Roosevelt initiates Budd into the most important affairs of state.

There is no doubt that the first volumes of Sinclair's epic, infused as they are with the spirit of anti-fascism, are interesting from the point of view of the information they contain. Active participants in the cycle include Roosevelt, Truman, Hopkins, the leaders of the Third Reich, ministers and generals, diplomats and writers. Events of tremendous importance unfold in vivid scenes before our eyes: the conferences in Versailles and Genoa, the fascist coup in Italy, crisis of 1929, Hitler's coming to power in 1933, the workings of the nazi government in the thirties as viewed from the "inside", and so on. Nevertheless Lanny Budd himself, as an artistic creation, lacks expressive force and is somewhat stereotyped: his exploits as an intelligence man, his success with the ladies, his luck and his impeccable behavior make

him out as a model hero, an ideal American, the sort of human cliché found in Hollywood pictures or popular literature. From the political point of view Budd is more "pink" than "red", though he considers himself a socialist. His anti-fascist sentiments are also expressed moderately—the money he has earned as an expert art dealer represents his contribution to the anti-fascist cause.

Unfortunately Sinclair pays obvious tribute to the currents of the cold war in the last volumes of his epic, particularly in the novel *The Return of Lanny Budd*. His hero is transformed into a zealous opponent of the "ideological" attacks of the reds. This blatant "fixing" makes the figure of Lanny Budd openly stilted. The general artistic level of the epic at its close is clearly lower than that of the first volumes with their strong anti-fascist sentiments.

Sinclair's noticeable shift in the late forties and early fifties "from rebellion to conformity", to quote Maxwell Geismar's pithy phrase, worked to his detriment as an artist in such books as *The Cup of Fury*, *What Happened to Didymus* and others); the same thing happened to many others like Dos Passos, Richard Wright and Steinbeck, writers in whom the spirit of rebellion and an enthusiasm for social criticism were extinguished. In his *Autobiography* (1962), as he reviews his past, Upton Sinclair obviously wants to round off the sharp corners, to "amortize" the denunciatory quality of his works. Still one cannot say that the aged author divorced himself from his past. In 1959 he announced, "I am as much Socialist to-day as I ever was."¹⁴ He advocated the bourgeois-democratic variety of socialism. But two weeks before his death, in his last interview, the writer asked that the following message be communicated to the Soviet people: "I want to tell the Soviet people one main thing: keep doing what you have been doing! All humanity should be grateful to you. Your work is sublime."¹⁵

Sinclair's life was long and dramatic. He knew what it meant to be attacked by critics, to be persecuted by the "yellow press", to see his books arouse heated arguments;

he knew the heights and the depths. Today, in the light of history, it is clear that he was a significant figure not only as a herald of justice, but also as a writer whose intellectual and artistic endeavors were of considerable importance.

Not only did he concentrate his attention on broad spheres of reality previously considered “unaesthetic” or “uninteresting”, spheres such as industrial production, the life and work of proletarians, and conflict between workers and employers. Together with London, Sinclair Lewis and Dos Passos he established a special variety of realism akin to sociology. He made his contribution to the formation and development of the “literature of fact” and so important a genre as the documentary publicistic novel. In his own way he expressed the internal tendency of contemporary prose as it strives for maximal veracity and trustworthiness—the interweaving of documentary, publicistic and fictional elements in the fabric of a literary work. These processes—more subtly and organically expressed, to be sure—can be observed in present American writers of a publicistic bent Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, James Baldwin and others). And not only American writers.

Upton Sinclair’s literary legacy is not peripheral. The services rendered to society by this writer and truth-seeker, this socialist of the emotions, the spirit and meaning of his works—these are the things that make him a classical figure in American literature.

NOTES

¹ *The Man from Main Street. A Sinclair Lewis Reader*, N.Y., 1953.

² Upton Sinclair, *My Lifetime in Letters*, Columbia, 1960, cover.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴ *The Man from Main Street. A Sinclair Lewis Reader*, p. 321.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 263.

⁷ Upton Sinclair, *Anthology*, Col., 1947, p. 280.

⁸ Fay M. Blake, *The Strike in the American Novel*, p. 90.

⁹ Upton Sinclair, *My Lifetime in Letters*, pp. 20-21.

- ¹⁰ Fay M. Blake, *The Strike in the American Novel*, p. 90.
- ¹¹ *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1961, p. 100.
- ¹² Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman, *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair. The Making and Unmaking of "¡Que Viva Mexico!"* Bloomington, 1970, p. 313.
- ¹³ Joseph North, *No Men Are Strangers*, N.Y., 1958, p. 151.
- ¹⁴ *People's World* (San Francisco), 1959, 12.IX, pp. 6-7.
- ¹⁵ *Daily World*, N.Y., 1968, 7.XI, N. 133, p. 6.

Y. ZASURSKY

THEODORE DREISER'S *AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY**

"The feet of Theodore are making a path, the heavy brutal feet. They are tramping through the wilderness of lies, making a path."¹ So wrote Sherwood Anderson, that remarkable writer, a friend and follower of Theodore Dreiser. Dreiser expanded the horizons of American realistic literature in spite of all the barriers which bourgeois America raised in his path and difficulties which pursued him throughout his conscious creative life.

Following Dreiser's death in 1945 the well-known American critic and publicist Henry L. Mencken wrote: "He was a great artist, . . . no other American of his generation left so wide and handsome a mark upon the national letters. American writing, before and after his time, differed almost as much as biology before and after Darwin. He was a man of large originality, of profound feeling, and of unshakeable courage. All of us who write are better off because he lived, worked and hoped."²

Many of the best traditions of 19th century American literature underwent development in Dreiser's works: the tradition of romanticism as embodied in Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville, the abolitionist tradition as represented by Thoreau and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

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A pointed rejection of the world of business links Dreiser with Cooper; a detailed manner of narration also unites the two authors. Hawthorne, one of Dreiser's favorite writers, early on attracted his attention through his condemnation of puritan sanctimoniousness, practicalness, egoism and greed. Melville was just as dear to Dreiser in this respect—the American critic Danforth Ross had good reason to compare Melville's story *Bartleby the Scrivener* with Dreiser's writings. A passionate zeal for unmasking all forms and manifestations of social injustice makes Dreiser close in spirit to the abolitionists. He felt a special affinity with that uncompromising recluse of Walden Pond and opponent of slavery, Henry David Thoreau. At the height of his active anti-fascist publicistic activity in the 1930s Dreiser published selected works of this American writer and philosopher in *Theodore Dreiser Presents the Living Thoughts of Thoreau*, to which he wrote a warm and penetrating preface. Dreiser's immediate forerunners included Mark Twain, that shrewd critic of "the gilded age", and Walt Whitman, the poet of emancipated labor and human reason.

A certain lag characterised the American literary process in the 19th century; romanticism was late in blooming, and realism developed at a slower pace than in most European countries. Theodore Dreiser deserves special credit for hastening its development in the 20th century.

Dreiser brought new life to American literature; he "came to housebound and airless America like a great free Western wind, and to our stuffy domesticity, gave us the first fresh air since Mark Twain and Whitman",³ said Sinclair Lewis in 1930.

Dreiser inaugurated 20th century American literature with a relentless and inexorable battle for justice; he paved the way for a pleiad of writers that included the greatest American writers of our times—Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway.

* * *

Theodore Dreiser was born Sunday morning, the 27th of August, 1871, in the little town of Terre Haute, Indiana. He was the twelfth child born to Sarah Schänäb Dreiser, a descendant of Czech emigrants from Moravia, and John Paul Dreiser, a local factory worker who had come to America in 1844 from Germany. The writer's childhood was one of want and deprivation. These were long, gray, gloomy, cold days, he would later recall, days when he had to subsist on potatoes and sometimes gruel, and often went hungry.

Dreiser began to live independently very early in life. At the age of sixteen he went to Chicago, worked as a waiter and dishwasher, a delivery boy for a laundry, and at many other low-paying jobs. And in each of his novels he returned in some form or other to episodes from his youthful wanderings and misfortunes.

It is true that Dreiser did manage, though only for a very short time, to study at the Indiana University in Bloomington, through the help of his former school teacher. He did a lot of reading while he was enrolled. Lev Tolstoy made a particularly strong impression on him, and under his influence the seventeen-year-old youth was struck by the notion, "almost as a new thought, that it would be a wonderful thing to be a novelist. If a man could but write like Tolstoy and have all the world listen to him!"⁴

Dreiser's literary inclinations manifested themselves after he took a job with the *Chicago Daily Globe* in 1892. During the nineties he worked as a reporter for many journals and newspapers, where his first essays and stories were published. In 1897 he abandoned his work as a journalist and devoted himself completely to writing.

The young Dreiser keenly felt the barrier that separated bourgeois journalism and literature from real life. "I was never more confounded," he later recalled, "than by the discrepancy existing between my own observations and those displayed here, the beauty and peace and charm to be found in everything, the almost complete absence of any reference to the coarse and the vulgar and the

cruel and the terrible.”⁵ And in *Sister Carrie* (1900), his first novel, he tried to describe real life as he himself saw it.

The heroine of the novel, Caroline Meeber, or Sister Carrie as they call her at home, comes from a blue-collar family. As a poor worker in a shoe factory, she at first becomes the mistress of Drouet, a travelling salesman, and later of the more well-to-do Hurstwood, who abandons his family and business and takes Carrie to New York, where he finds her work as an actress in a musical theater. Now that she has begun to climb the social ladder, Carrie leaves Hurstwood, who has completely ceased to attract her by proving incapable of supporting her. Despairing of ever finding work, Hurstwood commits suicide.

The central elements of the plot are based on facts which the writer knew firsthand—Emma, one of his older sisters, served as the prototype for the heroine of the novel. In the nineties Dreiser himself knew what it meant to search endlessly and without success for a decent job, and this true-life experience helped him draw a particularly vivid picture of Hurstwood as he wanders about New York in search of work.

But to all intents and purposes *Sister Carrie* was immediately banned in the United States. Doubleday Publishers, which had agreed to publish the book on the advice of Frank Norris, already a well-known writer at the time, decided upon reading the novel that it was immoral and ended up printing only one thousand copies; Norris distributed three hundred of these to various critics and journalists, and the rest never went on sale. It was only in 1907 that the book was republished in the United States, and then only after it had sold well in England, where it had been published with the help of the same Frank Norris.

Sister Carrie set the tone for Dreiser's subsequent works. We feel a profound compassion for the principal characters: Carrie, who manages to become an actress only at the expense of her best human qualities, and Hurst-

wood, who is brought to ruin and perishes in the depths of New York. The whole book is filled with concern for the fate of the simple man, the fate of the individual in America.

In the works which followed Dreiser returned again and again to the problems touched on in this novel. *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), his second novel, is devoted to the life of a simple and noble woman with a blue-collar background. The monumental *A Trilogy of Desire—The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914) and *The Stoic* (published posthumously in 1947)—recreates the image of the American businessman; the trilogy's hero, the financier Cowperwood, is not only one of those "Titans who, without heart or soul . . . were setting forth to enchain and enslave"⁶ the nation, but also a tragic figure who squanders his exceptional talents. *The Genius* (1915) describes an artist's clash with bourgeois America. The problem of individual as he is deformed, corrupted and destroyed by American society is posed in all of Dreiser's major works, but especially in *An American Tragedy* (1925).



An American Tragedy came out in the middle of the 1920s, a period whose byword was "prosperity". The Pollyannas of Americanism were announcing to the whole world that America was entering its "golden age".

"Haven't We All Become Rich?" was the title of an essay in *Collier's*, and the response was, "The only poor man is the one who wants to be poor or has been in an accident or suffers from some illness, and even such people occur in infinitesimally small numbers."

In this period of unrestrained eulogizing Dreiser published a book which told the truth about what was hidden behind this façade of ostentatious well-being. Its title was simple and severe: *An American Tragedy*. In it he depicted in a new way the simple man's griefs, which he himself had experienced firsthand. For the first

time the destruction of the human personality appeared before the author as an inevitable result of the normal workings of American society, as the manifestation of a profound national illness and national poverty, a national catastrophe in the United States, as an American tragedy. Dreiser's humanism in this novel is more active and reveals a greater degree of social consciousness—it stands to reason that Dreiser would call his work a sort of class epic which reflected the class antagonism enveloping the whole world.

The basic subject treated in *An American Tragedy* had intrigued Dreiser from the very beginning of his literary activity; it occurred to him soon after the publication of *Sister Carrie*. At the time he was working on the novel *The Rake*, which corresponds in some respects to *An American Tragedy*. Dreiser devoted almost five years—from 1920 to 1925—to *An American Tragedy*. His purpose, the author said, “was not to moralize—God forbid—but to give, if possible, a background and a psychology of reality which would somehow explain, if not condone, how such murders happen—and they have happened with surprising frequency in America as long as I can remember”.⁷

Helen Dreiser recalls that the writer had a set of notes entitled “American tragedies”. They contained descriptions of fifteen occurrences bearing resemblance to those depicted in the novel.

Dreiser's *Tragedy* centers around the 1906 murder by Chester Gillette of his girl-friend Grace Brown. The trial received tremendous publicity at the time, and Dreiser made use of many documents and facts reported in the newspapers when he wrote his *Tragedy*.

His work was aimed polemically against the cheap romantic apologues which were flooding the American market at the time. They typically told the story of a poor youth who makes a fortune and marries a girl from a well-to-do family. Novels of this sort gave the false impression that any American could easily control his own fate, and glorified the desire to amass wealth.

Constructing his novel on the same motifs, Dreiser debunked this striving after facile happiness and in the process created a genuine panorama of American society. Dreiser himself spoke of his desire to touch on all aspects of reality in his novel; in April 1927, he wrote: "I had long brooded upon the story, for it seemed to me not only to include every phase of our national life—politics, society, religion, business, sex—but it was a story so common to every boy reared in the smaller towns of America. It seemed so truly a story of what life does to the individual—and how impotent the individual is against such forces."⁸ The cult of the dollar tragically destroys the two young heroes of the novel—Roberta Alden and Clyde Griffiths.

Griffiths is essentially different from the heroes depicted in Dreiser's previous works. Carrie possesses an actress's talent, Jennie Gerhardt is striking for her spiritual qualities, Cowperwood is even likened to Lucifer, Witla is a talented artist. But Clyde has neither Witla's or Carrie's talent, nor Cowperwood's shrewdness and strength, nor Jennie's spiritual beauty and purity. He is a most ordinary and typical American youth who is "true to the standard of the American youth, or the general American attitude toward life..."⁹ Clyde's tragedy is both like and unlike the tragedy of Witla or Jennie. Bourgeois society tramples on Jennie's spiritual purity and mocks her most sincere and secret emotions; it destroys Witla's talent; but Clyde's fate is tragic precisely because he masters society's unwritten laws and tries as best he can to follow them, and hence his tragedy, the tragedy of a simple American, this American tragedy, is all the more terrible.

Clyde is the very incarnation of all that is ordinary, and in this sense he is also typical. Dreams and illusions cultivated in his childhood determine the fate of this young man who is seized by the irresistible desire to secure a life of ease, regardless of the price he has to pay.

The author accentuates Clyde's instability and susceptibility to the influence of his surroundings. The narra-

tive is constructed in such a way that Clyde is always the center of attention, and at the same time we clearly see the forces which form his character. "And the talk and the palaver that went on in the lobby and the grill, to say nothing of the restaurants and rooms," Dreiser writes, "were sufficient to convince any inexperienced and non-too-discerning mind that the chief business of life for anyone with a little money or social position was to attend a theater, a ball-game in season, or to dance, motor, entertain friends at dinner, or to travel to New York, Europe, Chicago, California."¹⁰

We thus come to understand how social conditioning determines the behavior of Clyde, who is filled with the desire to enter this world of luxury and wealth. These dreams define his attitude toward Roberta Alden. "For poor or not—a working girl by misfortune only—he could see how he could be very happy with her if only he did not need to marry her," Clyde reflects. "For now his ambitions toward marriage had been firmly magnetized by the world to which the Griffiths belonged."¹¹ Marriage to a rich girl strikes Clyde as being one way to fulfil his innermost desires. His career is more important to him than his feelings for Roberta; in his consciousness love cannot be separated from the notion of splendid surroundings, pleasures, wealth, and a distinguished position in society. Thus the groundwork is laid for Clyde's tragedy.

In *An American Tragedy* Dreiser achieved that surprising artistic integrity which distinguishes all true works of art. The title of the novel, its composition, the landscape described, the authorial digressions and the logical development of the characters and their psychology together reveal society's responsibility for Clyde's tragedy.

The schematic breadth of Dreiser's depiction of society in *An American Tragedy* is manifested in the composition of the novel. In April 1931, Dreiser wrote the following about the composition: "It was to be a novel which was to set forth in three distinct social, as well as economic phases, the career of a very sensitive yet not too highly mentally equipped boy, who finds his life in

its opening phase painfully hampered by poverty and a low social state and from which, because of his various inherent and motivating desires, he seeks to extricate himself."¹²

As he goes on to explain this thought Dreiser remarks that the first part of the book depicts those social misfortunes which might naturally overwhelm, suppress, upset, and consequently exaggerate the emotions and longings of a very sensitive boy who is poorly equipped to deal with the great life struggle which every youth faces.

The second part was designed, in Dreiser's words, to show how a person of this temperament might unexpectedly come face to face with a far more successful world which instills the desire for luxury and love, and how in the one-sided contest between poverty and illiteracy on the one hand, and the tremendous temptations of this world on the other, a person might easily and quite unwittingly be overwhelmed, and even accused of murder, as is the case with Griffiths.

The third part of the novel was painstakingly composed by Dreiser in such a way as to demonstrate how a weak character of this sort—originally a prisoner of his own illusions and then of the law—might become a victim of deeply prejudiced and revengeful provincial politicians who in turn, because of their social and religious narrow-mindedness, cannot perceive the mitigating circumstances of the crime and therefore, as Dreiser notes, are far more severe in their judgement than individuals of greater wisdom and perspicacity.

Thus the first part, the exposition, deals with the forming of Clyde's character, the second with Roberta's tragic death, and the third with Clyde's death. The plot centers around Clyde's personality and the development of his character in its interrelations with society. The frivolous salesgirl Hortense Briggs makes a fool of Clyde. His days of amusement in Kansas City end sadly—returning from a party one evening the car in which Clyde and his friends are riding runs down a girl, and when the fright-

ened youngsters try to escape the police, they get into an accident. Frightened to death, Clyde runs away from Kansas City. So his youth comes to an end; leaving his parents' home he begins a life of independence.

In the second book Clyde, after the ordeals and deprivation he has to undergo during his wanderings from city to city, comes under the guardianship of a rich uncle, an industrialist. It seems to Clyde that he can finally make a career for himself. Roberta Alden, a girl who works under him, now crosses his path, and though she is by no means a woman of loose behavior, Clyde manages to obtain her favors where previously he had been unsuccessful with the sophisticated Hortense Briggs, despite his courting and lavish gifts.

From the very beginning Clyde has no intention of marrying Roberta. His meeting with the rich Sondra Finchley sets Clyde to thinking that he might gain access to the world he so longs for, and forces him to find some means for getting rid of Roberta, who now stands in his way. Dreiser remarks that "he liked Roberta better. She was sweeter and warmer and kinder—not so cold".¹³ At the same time Sondra "had most materialized and magnified for him the meaning of that upper level itself",¹⁴ and he relates to her in a different way: "...considering his first approaches toward Roberta", his approach to Sondra "was without lust".¹⁵ While passion had governed his relation to Roberta, his relation to Sondra is governed by his own calculating, his visions of wealth, his admiration for those who for him represent high society. His passion for Roberta fades before the passion to force his way into the world of the rich.

Dreiser stresses the similarity between Clyde's and Roberta's character. For the naive girl Clyde personifies the world of luxury and wealth. "...Roberta, after encountering Clyde and sensing the superior world in which she imagined he moved and being so taken with the charm of his personality, was seized with the very virus of ambition and unrest that afflicted him."¹⁶ That is why she tries so persistently to get Clyde to marry her, and even

goes so far as to sleep with him, though she knows that such behavior is neither good, acceptable, or moral.

Clyde and Roberta are both inexperienced in the ways of the world; they could even be described as infantile. "...Clyde had a soul that was not destined to grow up,"¹⁷ Dreiser remarks. Their relationship culminates in Roberta's tragic death.

Scrupulously, as though he were examining all the circumstances surrounding the tragedy on Big Bittern Lake under a magnifying glass, Dreiser provides convincing motivation for all of Clyde's actions as he tries to free himself of Roberta.

Clyde reads a newspaper item about an accident on Pass Lake in which a man and a woman are drowned, but only the woman's body has been discovered. Further on Dreiser describes the chain of thoughts which lead Clyde to choose this fatal way out: "...he and Roberta were in a small boat somewhere and it should capsize at the very time, say, of this dreadful complication which was so harassing him. What an escape! What a relief from a gigantic and by now really destroying problem! On the other hand—hold—not so fast!—for could a man even think of such a solution in connection with so difficult a problem as his without committing a crime in his heart, really—a horrible, terrible crime? He must not even think of such a thing. It was wrong—wrong—terribly wrong. And yet, supposing,—by accident, of course—such a thing as this did occur? That would be the end, then, wouldn't it, of all his troubles in connection with Roberta?"¹⁸

The external cause which brings forth such confusion in Clyde's thoughts, though apparently quite insignificant, initiates a chain of events which culminate in Roberta's death and Clyde's conviction.

Dreiser is dialectical; he does not try to transform Clyde into an inveterate scoundrel and rascal and murderer, nor does he justify his actions. He wants to point out the true culprits guilty of Roberta's death, to show the moral degeneration of Clyde, who, in assimilating the spirit of individualism of his surroundings, becomes a crim-

inal before he has committed a crime. For Clyde understands that if he gets rid of Roberta by drowning her in the lake, he will have become a murderer. He hesitates thinking through all the possible consequences of his deed. An internal struggle goes on inside him, one which testifies to his mental confusion. And Dreiser passes sentence not so much on Clyde as on those who have morally prepared him to commit the crime.

The description of Roberta's death does not permit us to conclude that from a legal standpoint Clyde is guilty of murder, or to establish the degree of his guilt. The famous American jurist Clarence Darrow himself said that it was impossible to determine Clyde's guilt because the events on Big Bittern Lake are so muddled. American law schools devoted special attention to Roberta's murder as a case representing a real difficulty in law practice.

Clyde is guilty of Roberta's death, and at the same time he did not kill her himself—such is the basis for the further development of the plot. Clyde's broodings convey his confusion and fear, his pangs of conscience. The description of the events on the lake form the culminating point of the novel.

Dreiser worked on the scene on Big Bittern Lake with particular tenacity. He made a special visit to Big Elk Lake, where Gillette had killed Grace Brown, talked with eyewitnesses of the murder, and took a boat out onto the lake. Dreiser experienced great spiritual turmoil in writing the scene. He later admitted that he wept as he wrote the description of Roberta's death.

The third and final part of the work is taken up by the court examination of Clyde's case. Again the circumstances surrounding the crime pass before the reader's eyes. Again society's guilt is established, but the judges pass sentence on Clyde, whose guilt is difficult to establish and prove. The same society which has driven Clyde to commit the crime now sentences him to the electric chair.

An analysis of Clyde's thoughts and deeds make abundantly clear the incorrectness and bias of the court which

reviews his case. Clyde's tragedy consists not only in the fact that he has committed a crime, but also in the way he is judged. His fate is decided long before the beginning of court proceedings. He has become a plaything in the pre-campaign struggle of two bourgeois parties. The partiality of the judicial system, its bias and adherence to narrow-group interests are personified in the figures of Mason, the Public Prosecutor, the investigator Heath, and a large number of lawyers.

Among Dreiser's novels *An American Tragedy* is distinguished for its depth and comprehensiveness in dealing with the phenomena of American life. "Dreiser's novel is broad and boundless as the Hudson; it is immense as life itself," wrote Soviet film director Eisenstein; he was preparing a film version of *An American Tragedy* but was unable to complete the project because of opposition from Paramount Pictures.

In his earlier novels Dreiser used his stories, essays and sketches as draft outlines; in *An American Tragedy* these novels themselves served this function.

The description of Clyde's difficult childhood and youth recalls the first chapters of *The Genius* which speak of the young Witla and his ordeals; the rich Griffiths inevitably bring to mind *A Trilogy of Desire*; Clyde's and Roberta's parents evoke the images of Jennie Gerhardt's mother and father.

An American Tragedy develops those profound humanistic feelings and thoughts which run through Dreiser's preceding novels: the tragedy of the simple American's life as embodied in the lives of Hurstwood and Jennie Gerhardt; the condemnation of greed which constitutes the spirit of *A Trilogy of Desire*; and finally the credo of realistic art vindicated in *The Genius*, which also summons the writer to depict those aspects of life which are regarded as themes "unworthy" of art because of their banality.

The landscape and symbols and comparisons in the work are also realistic. The book begins and ends in twilight. The scene of Roberta's death on Big Bittern

Lake is profoundly symbolic. They first became close during a lakeside meeting. And now everything reminds him of that walk: "...overhead was one of those identical woolly clouds that had sailed above him at Crum Lake on that fateful day...". He intends to "look for water-lilies here today to kill time a little before..."¹⁹—these lilies again recall that first chance meeting on Crum Lake, when the happy Clyde "had been reaching over and pulling them up, tossing them with their long, wet stems at her feet..."²⁰. This detail redoubles the dramatic tension of the situation in which Clyde and Roberta find themselves.

The novelist pays close attention to the psychology of his hero. Clyde's spiritual torments as he awaits execution are analyzed and conveyed with the same scrupulousness that characterizes the author's treatment of landscape, portrait and details. Dreiser specially visited the death room in Sing Sing, where he conversed with men sentenced to death.

Dreiser often makes use of internal monologue, especially to reproduce Clyde's confused mental state. A newspaper report suggests to Clyde a possible way of getting rid of Roberta. And here internal monologue conveys the confusion and turmoil of Clyde's feelings as he tries in his exhausted and tormented state to pull himself out of the abyss. Dreiser's persistent examination of Clyde's psychology is intimately linked to the revelation of the social causes underlying the hero's traumatic experiences.

The title of the novel, to which Dreiser gave much thought, is also of great semantic significance. In its first variants the book was called *The Mirage*, a title setting off the illusoriness of America's conceptions of life. The theme of American illusions is most graphically traced in the depiction of Clyde's parents. In their home they have scores of proverbs and sayings hung on the walls, each of them branding a certain vice. When Clyde's mother learns of his misdemeanor in Kansas City she entreats the boy to remember the aphorism, "Wine is a mocker,

strong drink is raging and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise",²¹ and begs him not to yield to the devil's temptations.

People like Clyde's and Roberta's parents live in an illusory world far from reality; they "are born, pass through and die out of the world without ever quite getting any one thing straight. They appear, blunder, and end in a fog". Dreiser sees the essence of Americanism in this phenomenon: "As for the parents of Roberta, they were excellent examples of that native type of Americanism which resists facts and reveres illusions."²² A golden mirage destroys Clyde, destroys a human individual—but the meaning of the novel goes beyond this: American society is responsible for spreading and supporting these destructive illusions. The title which Dreiser finally settled on, *An American Tragedy*, perfectly conveyed the spirit of the novel, but was not to the liking of the publishers, who thought that the American public would take offence at the harshness of the title, and tried to force Dreiser to replace it with the name of the hero; here too, however, the author made no concessions.

An American Tragedy closed a very important chapter in the history of the battle for realistic art in the United States, against the limitations insisted upon by critics and publishers. Even William Dean Howells, a friend of Mark Twain and a theorist of realism, acknowledged these demands at the end of the 19th century.

In 1891 Howells affirmed that in America it would be impossible to find a book dealing with a subject similar to that of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. He wrote, "...it is one of the reflections suggested by Dostoyevsky's novel, *The Crime and the Punishment*, that whoever struck a note so profoundly tragic in American fiction would do a false and mistaken thing. . . . Our novelists, therefore, concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American, and seek the universal in the individual rather than the social interests."²³

Dreiser's novel refutes Howells' contention—not without reason did many critics call *An American Tragedy* the American *Crime and Punishment*; not without reason can one find traces of Dostoyevsky's influence in the novel. Dreiser himself often spoke of his interest in Dostoyevsky and *Crime and Punishment*; he defied Howells in showing that the tragic fate of the individual was an integral aspect of American society, and that "tragic" and "American" were concepts that had much in common.

Dreiser displayed a propensity for broad generalizations, a tendency characteristic of American literature in the twenties and thirties. It manifested itself in the works of Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald; it continues in the works of such contemporary writers as James Baldwin and Saul Bellow, Albert Maltz and John Oliver Killens. Each of them created his own *American Tragedy*, describing the tragic fate of Americans in his own way. Significant in this respect is Truman Capote's documentary novel *In Cold Blood*, which forty years after the appearance of Dreiser's novel once again draws attention to the problem of crime and punishment so keenly felt by American society.

In this sense *An American Tragedy* became the banner of critical realism in 20th century American literature. It set the basic trend for the future development of American literature. The flowering of critical realism in the United States is directly connected with the appearance of *An American Tragedy*.

It is true that *An American Tragedy* could not escape the standard accusations of "heavy-handedness" in style levied by American critics hostile to Dreiser. H. G. Wells answered these critics in the following manner: "It [Dreiser's *Tragedy*] is a far more than life-size rendering of a poor little representative corner of American existence, lighted up by a flash of miserable tragedy . . . it gets the large, harsh superficial truth that it has to tell with

a force that no grammatical precision and no correctitude could attain. . . ."²⁴

As a writer and humanist Dreiser saw the hostility of the capitalist system toward the individual and could not help searching for ways which would allow the personality to develop in true freedom. And Dreiser seriously considered what means might be employed to creating a social order which would make American tragedies impossible. While he was writing his novel Dreiser saw no possibility for finding a resolution to these critical problems affecting society's development. He said he had "no theories about life, or the solution of economic and political problems".²⁵

Dreiser's search for answers to the questions raised in *An American Tragedy* awakened his interest in the victory of the October Revolution in Russia. His trip to the USSR, which he describes in his book *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (1928), brought about fundamental shifts in his world outlook. The writer drew closer to the revolutionary workers' movement in the United States and wrote fiery publicistic works—*Tragic America* (1931) and *America Is Worth Saving* (1941). In July 1945, Dreiser joined the Communist Party of the United States. "The logic of my life and work," he wrote at the time, "leads me therefore to apply for membership in the Communist Party."²⁶ And to this day the author of *An American Tragedy* remains the greatest master of realistic literature in 20th century America. It is no accident that the sixties witnessed a revival of interest in Dreiser's works. The campaign of conformist criticism begun by Lionel Trilling shortly after the author's death in 1945 came to an inglorious end. Faulkner paid tribute to Dreiser.

The vitality of the Dreiser tradition, which opened up a new epoch in American literature, has been registered by the greatest American writers of the 20th century. This is the tradition of realistic art, which has given rise to the best works of 20th century American literature: *An American Tragedy*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Despite the prohibitions and entreaties of reac-

tionary criticism this tradition continues to survive in those works of contemporary American literature which stand up for truly humane ideals.

NOTES

- ¹ Sherwood Anderson, *Horses and Men*, N.Y., MCMXXIII, p. XII.
- ² W. A. Swanberg, *Dreiser*, N.Y., 1967, p. 636.
- ³ *The Man from Main Street. A Sinclair Lewis Reader*, N.Y., 1953, p. 8.
- ⁴ Theodore Dreiser, *Dawn*, N.Y., 1931, p. 555.
- ⁵ Theodore Dreiser, *A Book About Myself*, N.Y., 1927, p. 490.
- ⁶ Theodore Dreiser, *The Titan*, Moscow, 1957, p. 433.
- ⁷ *Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, A Selection, Vol. II, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 458.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy*, Vol. I, Book I, Lnd., 1930, p. 14.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 46-47.
- ¹¹ Ibid., Vol. I, Book II, p. 264.
- ¹² *Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, Vol. II, pp. 527-28.
- ¹³ Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy*, Vol. I, Book II, p. 335.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 317.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 375.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 256.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 174.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. II, Book II, pp. 24-25.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 71.
- ²⁰ Ibid., Vol. I, Book II, p. 269.
- ²¹ Ibid., Vol. I, Book I, p. 11.
- ²² Ibid., Vol. I, Book II, p. 249.
- ²³ W. D. Howells, *Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays*, N.Y., 1959, pp. 61-62.
- ²⁴ Dorothy Dudley, *Dreiser and the Land of the Free*, N.Y., 1946, p. 458.
- ²⁵ Robert H. Elias, *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature*, N.Y., 1949, p. 230.
- ²⁶ Theodore Dreiser, *Essays and Articles*, Moscow, 1951, p. 253.

A. ZVEREV

A LOVER'S QUARREL WITH THE WORLD: ROBERT FROST*

To picture American poetry of the 20th century without Robert Frost would be as difficult as picturing 19th century poetry without Edgar Allan Poe or Walt Whitman. Poe, Whitman and Frost represent the three high-points in American poetry. The significance of each has long since been acknowledged unanimously and universally. Even people who have no interest whatsoever in verse know these names.

The publication of two verse collections by Frost in Russian translation brought him wide recognition in the USSR. He was translated by the best Russian poet-translators: Ivan Kashkin, Mikhail Zenkevich, and Andrei Sergeyev. Outstanding Soviet poets—Alexei Surkov, Eduardas Mieželaitis, Konstantin Simonov—wrote of his work with love.

Frost's visit to the USSR in the autumn of 1962 was a memorable event for many. The eighty-eight-year-old poet astonished everyone not only with his youthful heart, his avid interest in the country he was shown and the people whose acquaintance he made, but also because here, as rarely happens, the real man coincided with the image of the poet conveyed in his verses.

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Andrei Biely once spoke of the "lyrical subject" of poetry which could not be equated to the actual creator. If the "lyrical subject" is the individual "I" of the author, his verses take on a distinct biographical coloring. But the "I" may also be an artistic construct, a "persona", a particular device which enables the author to shift from lyrical self-description to the depiction of the most varied levels of existence (which may be completely alien to him personally). And finally the "I" may represent the collective, what Biely called "the soul of the people, the soul of mankind". In striving to express what is common to all, poetry runs the risk of losing the intensity of unique individual expression; but the striving itself is natural for a poet whose horizons extend beyond the walls of his own room.

In great and genuine poetry the "I" of the poet always implies something more than the same "I" in ordinary discourse. Frost's poetry belongs to this category. The uniqueness of his poetry consists in the fact that his "lyrical subject" tells us about Frost as a man, Frost as an artist, and Frost as one who expresses the characteristic features of "collective" (in Biely's terms) consciousness.

Such a synthesis is a quality manifest only in great, genuinely great poetry.

There are poets who accurately and profoundly convey the tremendously complex spiritual world of contemporary man. These are poets of the individual "I" like Gregory Corso and Sylvia Plath, in whose world outlook and psychological reactions one can see the features of individual personality types formed by our epoch.

There are poets whose works above all create the impression of increasing virtuosity and greater creative breadth. We are speaking here, of course, about serious poetry, in which one's heightened attention to form, style and device does not in the least imply that the poet is neglecting the essence and meaning of poetic work, which are always designed to embody the poet's world and times in a multitude of ways. The "I" as artifice dominates in the works of many contemporary

American poets—Wilbur, Gary Snyder, John Berryman in his *Dream Songs* (to mention only the most interesting names).

There are poets who strive to express the collective “I”, to convey the thought constructs and views inherent to a given “generation”, say, the “beat generation”, which found its poetic voice in the works of Allen Ginsberg in the nineteen fifties. One should not conclude that poets of various creative bent are isolated from each other by an impenetrable wall, that Sylvia Plath’s poetry, for example, does not reflect her times, or that Allen Ginsberg is significant only as a spokesman for the beatniks, and not as a poetic figure in his own right. And still, when one reads the works of modern American poets, it is not all that difficult to establish what sort of artistic consciousness is dominant in any given case.

What is difficult is to point right now to an American poet capable of conveying contemporary reality in all its complexity—intellectual, moral, social, spiritual, and psychological. And of doing so in verses that are classically lucid in form and saturated with philosophical significance, but in such a way that the poetic edifice retains its purity and logical course. At the same time excluding the very possibility of discriminating between poetry “for the elite” and “for the masses”, achieving a unity of thought, feeling and expression that is as unique as the very personality of the poet, while remaining meaningful, accessible, of high artistic value and human significance for all readers.

Robert Frost was such a poet, capable of uniting in his works both clarity and profundity, complexity and accessibility, uniqueness and universality. The collection of his poems selected by Louis Untermeyer deserves to occupy a place alongside the *chef d’œuvres* of contemporary lyric poetry. In Robert Frost one can often see a poet of “eternal” themes, a poet of the land, of nature. But he was not cut off from the anxieties of his America, from her spiritual needs or from the artistic striving of the 20th century.

A superficial reading of Frost's poetry may give the impression that he is an artist who has delved deeply into the law of eternal return: birth, flowering, death, new birth. Or an artist whose works are all authentic and autobiographical. Or an escapist philosopher, a Thoreau of the 20th century who has retreated from the soulless and cruel reality of the megalopolis and found refuge under the forest canopy of New England.

Each of these impressions is true and reveals some facet of Frost's poetic world. But let us try to read Frost not only as a poet who has given us marvellous examples of lyrical and dramatic poetry, but also as one who has left us with an uncommonly authentic artistic testimony of *our epoch*. In the stream of books on Frost issuing from his native land the poet's work is rarely viewed from such an angle. Yet such an approach might prove both important and useful. The fact is that Frost, like many other eminent writers, became a sort of legend in his lifetime, and his "public image", created by numerous critics, from the Georgians on down to the critics represented in Richard Thornton's anthology *Recognition of Robert Frost* (1938), proved, it seems, to be rather distant from the essence of Frost as poet.

It would seem that Frost had less to complain about than other American poets as far as his literary fate was concerned. It is true that when his first book came out in 1913 he was already going on forty. Many of these poems had been gathering dust in his desk drawer. But on the other hand he was immediately noticed by such authorities of the American poetic scene as Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. With the appearance of his next collection, *North of Boston*, a year later, Frost gained the reputation of being one of America's leading poets. To the end of his days fame did not desert him. There were no notable interruptions or crises in his creative biography. His reputation grew steadily. The nineteen tens, which witnessed the "Poetic Renaissance" of the United States, were rich in poetic talent. American literature had never before known such a poetic revival. But for many

of the first-rate poets who made their debut almost simultaneously with Frost, life proved to be difficult and occasionally tragic. Some, like Ezra Pound, left America forever and, torn from their native soil, consigned the democratic traditions of American literature to oblivion and fell victim to elitist, formalistic theories. Others let themselves be corrupted by literary entrepreneurs and, in search of success, squandered their talent; one need only recall so gifted and brilliant a poet as Vachel Lindsay or Edgar Lee Masters, who remained the author of only one book worthy of his creative potential, his *Spoon River Anthology*. Still others, like Carl Sandburg, experienced periods of lingering failure, or, like William Carlos Williams, were a long time in finding themselves.

Perhaps of all the poets of the "Poetic Renaissance" only Frost proceeded on his long—close to fifty years—creative path with sure, even step, moving from one poetic height to the next, establishing himself ever more firmly in the reader's consciousness as the national American poet of the 20th century.

It is one thing to recognize an artist, but to understand his work is something far more difficult. Frost's earliest verses made it clear that here was a completely independent poet unlike any other. Frost was like an island, situated, it is true, not all that far from the mainland of American poetry, but separated from it by a sufficiently broad strait. It was necessary to understand what exactly distinguished Frost from his contemporaries. And the explanation was quickly found. Too quickly, in fact, for though it was based on actual features of Frost's poetic conceptions, it overlooked others, as a result of which Frost's creative temper was distorted. The explanation ran as follows: Frost in principle did not want to be a contemporary poet, did not want to respond to the "spirit of the times".

The situation in which American poetry found itself in the nineteen tens was complex, and it would be too perilous to outline this situation in a few words. Nonetheless one must observe that this was a period of decisive

thematic and artistic renewal. Reality was saturated with sharp social conflicts. Life was changing at a headlong, abnormal pace. The tentacles of sprawling cities were sweeping aside the sleepy provinces. America was becoming a land of "smoke and steel", to quote the title of one of Sandburg's collections. The first harbingers of the "jazz age" were making their appearance.

The feverish tempo of life infected poetry, and its canons, which had only recently appeared unassailable, were now collapsing.

Looking for support to the discoveries made by Whitman, who had not been understood by his contemporaries, young poets strove to convey the dynamism of their stormy age. Industrial America found its voice in Sandburg. Lindsay expressed the confusion of the young as they faced a civilization of material wealth and spiritual poverty; later F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos would write on the same theme. Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Lewis' *Gopher Prairie* traced their lineage back to *Spoon River*.

In another camp—this one headed by Ezra Pound—mind-boggling experiments with verse were taking place, and such avant-garde schools as Imagism, "Amygism" and Vorticism appeared and disappeared in rapid succession.

And what about Frost? He seemed to stand on the sidelines of these poetic movements, remaining a "conservative", an "archaist". He was not attracted by new themes or by *vers libre*, which was rapidly and decisively crowding out metrical verse. He learned far more from the English and American romantics than from *Leaves of Grass*. In many ways taking after Thoreau, Emerson and Keats, Frost reworked their favorite themes: he described nature, the farmer's labors, native scenes of rural New England. Among his favorite genres were those very ones which the "Interim" poets had succeeded in hopelessly compromising—all those epigones in the Riley mold imitating the Victorians with their syrupy voices. Frost loved the ballad, the song, the landscape, the pastoral.

When the public, which had begun to take an interest in *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*, discovered that the author had spent his boyhood in the country, that he had devoted his life to farming and found time to write poetry only in the evening, they formed a permanent image of Frost in their minds as a "peasant poet" far removed from the distemper of his times, one who strove consciously to speak not of the transient, but of the eternal.

So it seemed that the "national American poet" was indifferent to the drama and conflicts which agitated the America of his times.

Thus already at the onset of Frost's literary career there arose the myth of "the quietest of poets", the "stubborn optimist" with a profound faith in the eternal spiritual values of the toiling farmer, the poet who had retreated from the "madding crowd" to the canopied shelter of the eternally lovely New England woods, and urged his readers to follow his example. Thus arose the widespread and still prevailing notion of Frost as a custodian of the traditions of lyrical poetry, singing of the "simple life". "Poetry, in this book, seems determined, once more, just as it was in Alexandria, to invigorate itself by utilizing the traits and necessities of common life, the habits of common speech, the minds and hearts of common folk,"¹ wrote Lascelles Abercrombie in his review of *North of Boston*. And dozens of other critics followed his lead in expressing the same opinions.

Such judgements of Frost are not, of course, without foundation—he really was a "peasant poet", a bard of patriarchal New England. His quest for a harmonious and integrated perception of the world was undoubtedly inherent to his artistic thought. His "Horatian serenity" was a unique phenomenon for an epoch in which poets "ran wild in the quest of new ways to be new", an epoch governed by the spirit of reckless poetic experimentation. "Poetry, for example, was tried without punctuation. It was tried without capital letters. . . . It was tried without any images but those to the eye. . . . It was tried without

content under the trade name of poesie pure.... It was tried without ability."²

All these extremes of experimentation which Frost described in his preface to Edwin Arlington Robinson's *King Jasper* were always in the poet's field of vision; in opposition to the coquettish "difference" of many of his contemporaries, he chose "the old-fashioned way to be new" and felt a keen responsibility for the poetic word. The "archaic" quality of Frost, who clung stubbornly to traditional forms and vocabulary and felt himself to be a direct heir of the New England poets—Thoreau and Emerson, was called to life in part by the fact that American poetry at the time needed someone who would preserve the great romantic tradition, in some ways related to social utopianism. Frost realized it was his calling to guard this tradition, to develop it, and to oppose tendencies which "sorely strained" the "limits of poetry".

But a tradition will die if its defenders merely safeguard it from the encroachments of the next "new wave", are unable to infuse it with relevant, contemporary content. Frost called poetry "an effort to explain life", by which, of course, he meant contemporary life. He did not write free verse and said that he would rather play tennis without a net than employ *vers libre*, but this does not in the least imply that Frost's metrical verse was the same as Longfellow's. He did not strive along with his contemporaries "to include a larger material", for often as a result of such efforts the poet "gets lost in his material without a gathering metaphor to throw it into shape and order".³ In comparison to T. S. Eliot or Carl Sandburg Frost was a poet of "narrow", local and always traditional material. But does that mean that Frost's "metaphor", in other words his poetic image, is equivalent to James Russell Lowell's "metaphors" or those of Edwin Arlington Robinson, a poet incomparably closer to Frost? Does this mean that Frost's "narrow" material does not reveal some absolutely new artistic qualities to the reader, or appear in an absolutely new artistic dimension?

Frost is too strikingly different from his New England

predecessors for us to explain away these differences simply in terms of the creative individuality or uniqueness which nature bestows on any outstanding talent. It would be difficult to solve the "riddle" of Frost by examining his poetics from the inside, as a closed system. In the first decades of the 20th century the American poetic tradition was being rejuvenated, and here Frost had a decisive role to play. The American literature of those years was realistic, and Frost belonged to the aesthetic movement of his times, regardless of how traditional and "timeless" he may have appeared to be.

Here we approach the very essence of the problem. A realistic artistic system does not, of course, presuppose photographic fidelity in its reflection of the surrounding world. It presupposes above all an attempt to grasp the true laws of life, to penetrate the essence of life processes—social and individual, spiritual and psychological. It demands an objective view of the world. It entails not only a new aggregate of expressive means, but also a reconsideration of various aesthetic and philosophical categories which have determined the specific features of poetry in earlier periods, in particular romantic poetry.

For Frost the most important of these categories was understanding the people and the life of the people.

The romantic tradition lay at the foundation of his art, but as an artist of realistic bent he gave new meaning to a principal aspect of this tradition—the way it reflected the people's life. For the romantics "the people" was an abstract and static spiritual substance. For Frost "the people" emerges as a category of historical existence. This was a great shift. Having apparently exhausted all its possibilities and now compromised in the "twilight interval", the romantic tradition received a powerful stimulus. Facing new aesthetic demands, the tradition proved its vitality, and the continuity of poetry was preserved.

In place of the mythologized and decorative "folk style" of the romantics Frost brought a peculiar artistic concept of "autochthony", to borrow the term from Mircea Elia-

de's *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries* (1960). Speaking of "autochthony", Eliade implies a profound and frequently unconscious sense of belonging to the place: "men feel that they are *people of the place*, and this is a feeling of cosmic relatedness deeper than that of familial and ancestral solidarity".⁴

This seems to be a relevant and true description of Frost's outlook too. In the context of literary history this "autochthonic" sense which is conveyed in his poetry is possibly Frost's greatest achievement.

No matter how diligently James Whitcomb Riley imitated simple folk speech, his poetic "I" simply served to convey certain conventional features of the people's character. Frost's "I" is not only a personality, not only the alter ego of the author, but also a full participant in the nation's life. And the measure of all things in Frost's poetry is the "autochthonic" sense of true and false values. Above all his outlook implies those democratic traditions and ideals which Frost associated with the names of the "four greatest Americans: George Washington, the general and statesman; Thomas Jefferson, the political thinker; Abraham Lincoln, the martyr and savior; and fourth, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the poet".⁵

When I speak of Frost as the most "autochthonic" American poet of the 20th century, I have in mind not only such poems as "The Gift Outright" (which, however, are certainly worth rereading particularly at this point, when books like Gore Vidal's *Burr* are so astonishingly popular). Rather, I have in mind those poems which contain no outright declarations, poems which recreate with unique breadth and objectivity a picture of the people's life in all its diversity, its normal course, which for the poet is inseparable from the course of his own life; poems like the ones you find in Frost's two best collections—*North of Boston* and *New Hampshire*.

*I touch my tongue to the shoes now,
And unless my sense is at fault,
On one I can taste Atlantic,
On the other Pacific, salt.*⁶

Here is a precisely formulated poetic motif, one which is repeated at various stages in Frost's artistic development. Though a "New England" poet, he often returned to this theme of the great American expanses, moving far beyond the immediate horizons of New England. When he was a child Frost crossed the American continent twice over, and as a poet he was keenly aware that this was his world, his universe; in his verses the most varied facets of the image of America are explored. But Frost's America is always a country that belongs to people capable of preserving the vital link that binds them to nature and to each other, of filling their lives with high ethical meaning, for this is an active, creative, morally pure and healthy life. And the major lyrical principle in all of Frost's books—from *A Boy's Will* to the last collection *In the Clearing*—is the feeling that the poet and his world are indivisible, that all men are brothers working together on this earth (" 'Men work together', I told him from the heart, // 'Whether they work together or apart' "), that nature and man and all men are united:

*I had for my winter evening walk—
No one at all with whom to talk,
But I had the cottages in a row
Up to their shining eyes in snow.*

*And I thought I had the folk within:
I had the sound of a violin;
I had a glimpse through curtain laces
Of youthful forms and youthful faces.*

I had such company outward bound. . .⁷

Frost's poetic intonation is the intonation of things left unspoken, at times even of mystery. The lines above are taken from the poem "Good Hours", which Louis Untermeyer calls a "quizzical" poem, and in fact it can be interpreted on various levels; there is no clearcut, logical conclusion or aphoristic formula at the end.

In his time Malcolm Cowley severely rebuked Frost for his unwillingness to speak of life definitively and

clearly, for the vagueness of his poetic judgements (cf. his essay of 1944 "The Case Against Mr. Frost" in *Robert Frost. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962). It would be hard to find a more unjust statement regarding the poet. In his brilliant essay "The Figure a Poem Makes" Frost asserts, "The possibilities for tune from the dramatic tones of meaning struck across the rigidity of a limited meter are endless."⁸ The poet's own experience led him to this conviction; a poem by Frost is always the most subtle interweaving of "dramatic tones of meaning", whereas graphic precision of line and clarity of meaning would only destroy the entire artistic structure of Frost's poetry.

Cowley's mistake consists in the fact that he immediately identifies the poetic device with the content of the lyric. But the content itself was never ambiguous or vague. Edward Thomas, a member of the Georgian circle, wrote that *North of Boston* was "one of the most revolutionary books of the time", and though Frost was never a revolutionary in his social views, one could nonetheless concur completely with this statement. Frost's epic canvas with its profound fidelity to life was very much a revolutionary event in American poetry. Frost's objective view on the life of the people, his effort to merge totally with the people and assume their view on life's fundamental problems—all these things were in fact revolutionary for the poetry of the time.

Frost has profoundly tragic verses—recall "Home Burial", where a woman mad from grief after losing her only child is prepared to doubt whether another's sorrow is capable of touching anyone, whether people are really brothers:

*No, from the time when one is sick to death,
One is alone, and he dies more alone.
Friends make pretense of following to the grave,
But before one is in it, their minds are turned
And making the best of their way back to life...⁹*

Nor were satirical genres alien to Frost—the figure of the “Vermont Democrat . . . Lafayette” in the poem “A Hundred Collars” is ample proof of that. But neither the tragic nor the satirical proved in the end to be Frost’s calling. His calling was the objective depiction of the people’s life—not quietism, not “stubborn optimism”, but the intense experience of everything going on in America as his own personal experience. From the very start his poetry was addressed to all America and belonged to all America. Gazing intently at the life processes going on in his native, rural New England, Frost discerned something of great importance for his native land.

“I had a lover’s quarrel with the world,”¹⁰ Frost said of himself, and he could not have expressed himself more exactly, for his truly was a lover’s quarrel, a recognition of life’s drama which did not lead to a rejection of this life in the name of some ideal, nor to the setting up of his own, isolated world in contrast to the life around him. Yes, Frost belonged to this world, but he never looked at it through the rose-colored glasses of superficially understood patriotism. He saw this world in its true light and linked himself irrevocably to it. Otherwise he would have proved incapable of that organic understanding of the world’s anxieties which so astonishes us in Frost’s lyrics. The call of the city, luring us with its tawdry splendors, the lost harmony of man and the earth on which he toils, the growing mistrust and alienation between people who were once united by common cares, and the poet’s unflagging feeling of belonging to that great body known as the People—all this we find in Frost and his remarkably, profoundly realistic panorama of the people’s life.

Frost’s comments on “two types of realist” are well known: “There are two types of realist—the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real one; and the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I am inclined to be the second kind. To me, the thing that art does for life is to clean it, to strip it to form.”¹¹ Another of his statements on the same sub-

ject is less well known: "Instead of a realist—if I must be classified—I think I might better be called a Synecdochist; for I am fond of the synecdoche in poetry—that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole."¹²

It is this "synecdochism" which constitutes the basis for Frost's realistic poetics. The situations described in his dramatic verses sometimes come close to being casual, and in any case very commonplace. But they are imbued with genuinely poetic content, for behind the "individual" there is always the "general", the "autochthonic". In "Mending Wall" Frost talks about a most commonplace occurrence: the wall separating a farmer's land from that of his neighbor has crumbled and must be repaired. For the romantic poet this would serve as an occasion to embark on a poetical meditation on the passage of time; such a possibility is also hinted at in "Mending Wall":

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down. I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly. . .*¹³

But Frost is a poet with a realistic bent; he discovers a completely different aspect in the motif "Something there is that doesn't love a wall", a rich image which serves to convey notions of true and false in the mind of the people. The "autochthonic" sense in this poem is not, of course, conveyed by the simple, peasant-like, practical considerations which Frost imputes to his hero ("My apple trees will never get across// And eat the cones under his pines"),¹⁴ nor by the abundance of folkish expressions. The poet, as it were, set himself the task of reproducing in detail the thought processes of an ordinary farmer, and every trifle is important for him—the fact that there is no livestock on the farm, and therefore that the wall serves no purpose, and the fact that in lifting up the stones he and his neighbor scrape their fingers raw: "The work of hunters is another thing: // I have come after them and made repair."¹⁵ Frost's realism is based in large measure on his exact knowledge of the material at hand; but this is not the realism of the "particular", not the realism of

details, but of the "universal", the people's point of view. The desire to fence oneself off from others, to shut oneself off in one's own little world, is a notion quite alien to the people:

*I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.*¹⁶

The fact that a nearby farmer with such a motto as "Good fences make good neighbors" appears in Frost's poem is not mere coincidence. Even though for Frost's hero he is "like an old-stone savage armed", Frost himself realized that such neighbors on nearby farms were increasing in number. The tragic spirit that informs so many of Frost's poems consists in the fact that his attraction to the people clashes with his realization of the growing differentiation, particularly social differentiation, among the people. As an artist and realist Frost could not ignore this process. Throughout his works one can find images that speak of the passing of the village, that cradle of unity and "plebeian" democracy which was so dear to Frost, images telling us how this world has collapsed under the pressures of the 20th century, that it is undergoing a period of crisis and decline.

*"Where is your village? Very far from here?"
"There is no village—only scattered farms.
We were but sixty voters last election."*¹⁷

("The Mountain")

But Frost's importance consists, of course, not only in the fact that he recognized the "seeds of degeneration" which had fallen on New England soil. Perhaps he was even mistaken in defending the view that the village, despite all its internal conflicts (of which Frost was well aware), nonetheless remained the only firm foundation for democratic world order. But having accepted the

“autochthonic” view of the state of things (even sometimes equating it with the viewpoint of the ordinary farmer—granted that to a certain degree he was a conventional figure), and having come to a realistic perception of life, Frost was able to grasp genuinely and subtly the changes taking place in his native rural America, and to defend, convincingly but without pretention, ideals shared by the people. Without this indivisibility of the poet and the people, Frost’s artistic vision would lack that real originality which draws us in such masterpieces as “The Pasture”, “October”, “Blueberries”, “Birches”, or “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”. Amazing in their intensity of lyrical feeling and their musicality, all these verses are born of a perception of nature which would be impossible for a man who had not come into daily contact with it—like a farmer or laborer.

The feeling of distress over the changes taking place in his native region is sometimes expressed with surprising forcefulness in Frost’s verses. His images are artless, but they are animated by an elevated sense of tragedy, as for example in “The Woodpile”, where a stack of firewood left lying outdoors becomes a symbol for neglect, for a land that is wasted, for disintegration:

*And it was older sure than this year’s cutting
Or even last year’s or the year’s before.
The wood was gray and the bark warping off it
And the pile somewhat sunken. . .*¹⁸

.
. *and I thought that only
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself, the labor of his axe,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.*¹⁹

Nonetheless it would hardly be accurate to describe Frost’s poetry as “saturnine terror that creeps up unnoticed” (as Ivan Kashkin once described it). Yes, Frost felt

deeply the tragedy of the land, how it had been reclaimed from the swamps and salinas and had flowered, and now, against the will of those who had made it bear fruit, it was once again reverting to a state of wildness and desolation. The poet felt himself a part of the drama of that disintegrating world out of which America had grown. But regardless of how distressing were the consequences of the onset of the "machine age" in world so dear to Frost, the poet saw that democratic ideals had not died, and his faith in the imperishability of the people's moral health lent even greater cogency to his work.

His poetry is imbued with this faith. Sometimes, immersed in his love for his native land, Frost seems not to notice that enormous world, replete with its own concerns, which extends beyond the horizons of New England. At times he resembles the hero of his poem "The Mountain", who tries to fence himself off from the universe, to withdraw into the shell of his own monotonous existence, to limit himself to the confines of his own village:

*The mountain held the town as in a shadow.
I saw so much before I slept there once;
I noticed that I missed stars in the west,
Where its black body cut into the sky.
Near me it seemed: I felt it like a wall
Behind which I was sheltered from a wind.*²⁰

But Frost had good reason to call his *North of Boston* a "Book of People". The character of this collection, like that of all of Frost's works, is defined by those poems in which the poet gazes intently on the people's life without taking "shelter from a wind", penetrating its drama and playing the role of an active participant. This distinguishing trait of Frost's poetry emerges with particular clarity in his dramatic works. Sometimes they are called "narrative", which is inaccurate. It is precisely the dramatic element which Frost valued so highly in poetry. He wrote, "Everything written is as good as it is dramatic."²¹ The form and subject of these stories and scenes written

in blank verse, were for the most part taken directly from folk ballads. The folkloric base also makes itself felt in the devices Frost uses to develop character, and even in the choice of character (for example, the tight-fisted boss and the sharp farm-hand in the poem "The Code"). Perhaps the best known of all of Frost's dramatic works is "The Death of a Hired Man". It is one of Frost's most brilliant poems. Here, perhaps, more than anywhere else, we find the fullest treatment of Frost's major themes—the disintegration of the once unified world of New England, and the search for what is undyingly human.

As in his other dramatic poems, Frost here works with a particular and very simple subject, one that recalls that of the typical "edifying" novella. Of course it was important for Frost to "fill in" the plot; the "action" (the term itself is quite conventional in this case) had to be as simple as possible, which would lend added significance to each of the characters' movement. The characters in turn were to be drawn only in the barest outline; the reader himself was to fill in their characters and discern behind their mutual relations those objects of importance in the world depicted by Frost.

The poem tells the story of three people: Warren, Mary and Silas, a hired laborer who displeases Warren, the farm owner, because he is a bad worker. Frost elevates their story to the level of an impressive folk drama. Silas is one of those Frostian heroes who fears the approaching destruction of the world so near and dear to him; not knowing where misfortune will strike next, he nonetheless feels its presence and tries—naively but nobly—to forestall it. Four years earlier one Harold Wilson had worked with Silas on the farm, but he was a "new man" who "studied Latin like the violin" and who left the communal world so dear to Silas. His attempts to bring Harold back are obviously doomed to failure. But Silas is a man "concerned for other folk", and in his care for Harold he is acting selflessly. Warren's farm does not belong to him; he is simply a hired hand. But the farm is his home, and when the home is collapsing, everyone

living in it, no matter what room he occupies, must do everything to save the building. That is what Mary says to Warren, but she hears in response only the unsentimental judgement of a man who has rejected the generations-old notion of how one should treat one's neighbors—

*"Warren," she said, "he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."
"Home," he mocked gently.*

"Yes, what else but home?"

*"It all depends on what you mean by home. . ."*²²

Warren, like Harold, is a man who has broken off his ties with the "autochthonic" tradition. The latter has gone to the city, while the former, though remaining on the farm, does so only for reasons of expediency:

*"When was I ever anything but kind to him?
But I'll not have the fellow back," he said.
"I told him so last haying, didn't I?
If he left then, I said, that ended it.
What good is he? Who else will harbor him
At his age for the little he can do?"*²³

The poem ends with Silas' death. Nothing has really changed: Warren is still the sole owner of the farm, and he is free to hire and fire laborers; Harold will not come back to take up farm work again. And for Frost this is clearly the natural course of things. In contrast he can point only to the selfless devotion of people like Silas, who still embody the people's notion of what is honorable for man and what is fatal. Of course there were other forces at work in America which did not accept Warren's morals and did battle with them; Frost did not notice them, for they lay beyond the limits of the world which he himself had fully comprehended in his thoughts and imagination. In his books this world was examined in a unique and profound manner, and the ideals to which Silas adhered and which were so dear to Frost himself were far from being reactionary ("back to patriarchal simplicity") but

rather democratic in character. Frost's realism and sincere democratic impulses made him the greatest American poet of the 20th century.

And a broad range of readers (not only in the poet's homeland) have long since acknowledged Frost, the real Frost—not as an intellectual dressed in home-spun farmers' clothes, not as a conformist, not as an unthinking composer of idylls and pastorals, but as an artist who expressed the people's view on the complex, sharply contradictory world of America in the 20th century, one who believed in the people and shared their hopes, their democratic traditions and ideals. This is how he appears if we approach his work without prejudice.

NOTES

- ¹ Lascelles Abercrombie in L. Thompson, *Robert Frost. The Early Years, 1874-1915*, N.Y., 1966, p. 451.
- ² *Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, N.Y., 1966, pp. 59-60, Introduction to "King Jasper".
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- ⁴ Mircea Eliade. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, London, 1960, p. 164.
- ⁵ *Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, p. 111.
- ⁶ *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, N.Y., 1961.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- ⁸ *Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, p. 18.
- ⁹ *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, p. 72.
- ¹⁰ *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, N.Y., 1969, p. 355.
- ¹¹ *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, ed. by James D. Hart, N.Y., 1956, p. 264.
- ¹² *A Pocket Book of Robert Frost's Poems*, N.Y., 1961, p. 31.
- ¹³ *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, p. 48.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ²¹ *Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, p. 13.
- ²² *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, p. 53.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

T. MOTYLYOVA

SINCLAIR LEWIS AND HIS BEST NOVELS*

Soviet readers first became acquainted with the works of Sinclair Lewis more than half a century ago; a Russian translation of his novel *Babbitt* was published in 1922, followed by a translation of *Main Street*. A number of other novels (including his earlier works—*Our Mr. Wrenn*, *The Trail of the Hawk*, *The Innocents*, *Free Air*) have also appeared at various times in Russian translation. During the second half of the thirties the appearance of Lewis' anti-fascist novel *It Can't Happen Here* in particular excited the interest of the Soviet reading public. After the Second World War translations of *Gideon Planish* and *Kingsblood Royal* appeared and achieved wide popularity. The attention devoted by the Soviet public to Sinclair Lewis has never slackened. At various times literary critics and theoreticians have devoted studies to him: Ivan Anisimov, Sergei Dinamov, Anna Elistratova, Maurice Mendelson, Anna Romm, Alexander Krivitsky and the author of these lines; Boris Gilenson has written a dissertation on Lewis which was eventually published as a separate book called *The America of Sinclair Lewis*.

In 1965 the Pravda Publishing House came out with Sinclair Lewis' *Collected Works* in nine volumes: it in-

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cluded the novels *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Ann Vickers*, *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, *It Can't Happen Here*, *Gideon Planish*, *Kingsblood Royal*, *Mantrap*, as well as selected essays and stories. The set came out in an edition of 350 thousand copies, which were quickly sold out. In 1973 the Khudozhestvennaya Literatura Publishing House issued in their "Library of World Literature" series a volume containing *Babbitt* and *Arrowsmith*, Lewis' most popular works in the Soviet Union. It was published in an edition of 300 thousand copies; like preceding editions, this one too was completely sold out in a short time.

What do Soviet readers value in Sinclair Lewis? And what does the Soviet critic understand his place to be in the history of American literature and universal literature? The observations which follow represent an attempt to answer these questions based on the conclusions of Russian literary scholarship and the judgements and appraisals of writers and critics of other European countries.

* * *

The masters of the realistic novel in the U.S.A. of the twentieth century through their common efforts accomplished a tremendous task. They examined American reality from various perspectives and helped their readers to understand how little it really corresponded to the "American Dream". As a critic of the bourgeois world Sinclair Lewis can be ranked with such outstanding novelists as Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe. He found his theme, his point of view, in the representation of life in the United States. In contrast to the author of *The Financier* and *The Titan* he did not delve into the secrets of "big business"; in contrast to Hemingway he did not touch on the problems of the "lost generation", traumatized by the First World War. He did not create such broad, all-encompassing canvases as Dreiser, Faulkner or Wolfe,

and was not so subtle a psychologist and stylist as Hemingway or Fitzgerald. His strength as an artist lay elsewhere: in his tremendous knowledge of the life and morals and psychology of the "average American", and in the art of satire. The author of *Babbitt* could discern vulgar mediocrity, philistine narrow-mindedness and money-grabbing selfishness in its most common, everyday manifestations. As no one before him, he exposed the spiritual pettiness of the American bourgeois before the eyes of the whole world.

I recall in this connection a conversation I had long ago with an American woman journalist, a sharp-witted and fiery debater. "Oh," she said, "so you Russians know American literature well, do you? It's all selective and one-sided! You love those authors who play the role of dissidents and show their country in a bad light. Why is it you keep republishing Sinclair Lewis? Because he depicts Americans as dull-witted philistines!"

I had every reason to raise objections. The Russian reader reacts with real animation to the lofty poetic images of America that he finds in, say, Walt Whitman, or in O. Henry's kind humor. And as for Sinclair Lewis, we value him as well for his authentic and loving portrayals of honorable and brave Americans.

Lewis' creative work, needless to say, consists of more than just satire. Positive, even heroic characters often make their appearance in his novels. But the satiric element is always present—such is the nature of this great writer's talent; he was exceptionally keen in observing the base and comical aspects of life. The element of satire—in *Arrowsmith*, for example—heightens the drama of conflict between the honorable, thinking man and the proprietors, careerists, and the shallow and petty men with whom life inevitably brings him into contact.

The four novels which Sinclair Lewis published in fairly rapid succession after the First World War are thematically completely unrelated: *Main Street* (1920) is the story of an intelligent, cultured woman trying to resist the onslaughts of provincial philistinism; *Babbitt* (1922)

portrays a typical, "average" businessman; *Arrowsmith* (1925) is a novel about the fate of a scholar; *Elmer Gantry* (1927) describes the career of a roguish preacher. Nonetheless they could be viewed as a sort of cycle united by a common overall theme. They show in an uncompromisingly critical light what is commonly called "the American way of life"; Sinclair Lewis' criticism is not directed against Americans as a nation, nor against the nature of man as such, but rather against a social system built on the private ownership of property and the pursuit of profit. Social and psychological analyses are here fused together. And it is no coincidence that these novels in particular marked the beginning of his meteoric rise to international fame and brought him the Nobel Prize in 1930, making him the first American author to be so honored.

Lewis' artistic legacy as viewed from the distance of time is neither homogeneous nor of consistently equal value.

Sometimes he wrote works designed merely to entertain, which contained only a glimmer of serious thought: these include not only such early stories as *Our Mr. Wrenn*, but also a number of novels written at a later date such as *Mantrap*, *Bethel Merriday* and *Cass Timberlane*. In some books he abandoned the sober critical realism of his best works, trying, as it were, to make peace with the society of property owners—such tendencies are already present to some extent in the novel *Dodsworth*; they are much more clearly expressed in such later works as *The Prodigal Parents* and *The God-Seeker*. And yet to this day readers think of Sinclair Lewis not as the author of these somewhat shallow works, but as the creator of daring and significant works distinguished for their keenness of vision, innovativeness and originality in dealing with the vital problems of the day.

American literary critics, who acknowledge the merits of the author of *Babbitt* and *Arrowsmith* unwillingly and with reservations, are wrong in asserting that his creative work declined in quality after he received the Nobel

Prize. The English critic Walter Allen is also wrong when he states in his book *Tradition and Dream* that Lewis' true creative accomplishments are to be found only in the twenties and that beginning with *Dodsworth* he went over to the side of American businessmen. In actual fact the creative path Lewis followed was far more tortuous and complex. True, one can find artistic errors and miscalculations mixed in with his undeniable successes. But if we examine his writing career as a whole, in chronological order, we can understand more clearly the internal reasons for his creative and conceptual fluctuations, the constant alternation of successes and failures. Moreover it will become apparent that the novelist who won fame as the courageous exposé of the world of Babbitts was able to justify his fame—if not in all his succeeding books, then at least in the best of them, including *Ann Vickers*, the story of a woman who champions the cause of justice, *It Can't Happen Here*, a powerful anti-fascist pamphlet-novel, *Gideon Planish*, the satirical portrait of a bourgeois politician, and finally *Kingsblood Royal*, one of the best works of American literature dealing with discrimination against the Blacks.

While Harry Sinclair Lewis, the son of a doctor from the provincial town of Sauk Center in Minnesota and a graduate of Yale University, was spending the years preceding the First World War preparing himself in the practical school of literary work—newspaper reporting, editing and publishing—now in Iowa, now in California, now in New York—nothing, it seemed, presaged the shrewd critic of the bourgeoisie and philistinism that he was to become in his best, mature works. His first stories and novels, while bearing the imprint of literary talent, were at the same time close in many respects to the generally accepted standards of bourgeois letters. Subsequently, Lewis was to say that his literary career began with *Main Street*, i.e., in 1920. But already in the years when his literary talent was beginning to form, the soon-to-be-famous novelist was not only amassing impressions that would later be echoed in his mature work, but was

also giving serious thought to the problems of the surrounding world, and he began to feel the necessity of revealing the bitter truth directly to this world.

We should in this connection devote some attention to his essay "Relation of the Novel to the Present Social Unrest: The Passing of Capitalism", published in the journal *The Bookman* in November 1914, immediately after the beginning of the First World War. The dramatic conflict that had flared up in distant Europe prompted the young American writer to share his thoughts concerning the fate of the contemporary novel, and what is more, the fate of modern man. Upon analyzing the works of Herbert Wells, Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair and a number of other less well-known writers, Lewis came to the conclusion that there could be no serious literature without the serious criticism of capitalism, for the will of history had doomed this social system to destruction.

"And does it not by now seem that practically every writer—certainly in America and to some extent in England—who is gravely seeking to present the romance of actual life as it is today, must perforce show capitalism as a thing attacked, passing—whether the writer lament or rejoice or merely complain at that passing? Few of them have any very clear idea of how the passing is to occur; as to what is to take its place. And now more than ever, with the European war shaking all the belief of the International Socialist in their might, one wonders what and how and why and when. Yet there it is, in nearly every seeing writer of today—an attack on capitalism."¹

We can find an even harsher formulation of the same position in the finale of the article: "...practically every thoughtful writer of today sees behind the individual dramas of his characters a background of coming struggle which shall threaten the very existence of this status called capitalism. Approve or disapprove—there's the struggle, mirrored in fiction."²

So we see that already at the beginning of the First

World War Sinclair Lewis defined for himself the conceptual basis on which any honest, thoughtful writer in the twentieth century would have to build his work. And it was precisely on this foundation that Sinclair Lewis was later to construct his best social novels, profoundly anti-bourgeois in their very essence.

In the essay we have cited Lewis mentions novels of English and American prosaists in which working men play a central role; for contemporary literature, he says, "the glory of the Classes is gone, the time of the Common People has come".³ The man who was later to write *Babbitt* was firmly convinced of this. But at this point certain problems arose which presented considerable difficulty for him as an artist. And they remained difficult until the end of his life.

Capitalism is doomed to death. But exactly how will this happen, and what will arise as a result of its destruction? It was inevitable that Sinclair Lewis should ponder such questions, just as it was for many other honest Western intellectuals, both during the period of the First World War and, as it drew to a close, following the October Revolution in Russia. When the heroine of Lewis' *Ann Vickers* learns about the Russian revolution she reflects: is it not fated that her future child will remember the 7th of November, 1917, as a day marking the greatest event in the history of mankind? It is possible, and even probable, that Sinclair Lewis had similar thoughts. But the prospects of a revolutionary socialistic upheaval were more likely to frighten than attract him. Moreover at various stages in his life the fear of such an upheaval "clipped his wings" to some extent, and made him less able to stand up to the social system which he himself regarded as obsolete and doomed to death.

As evidenced in the letters he wrote Lewis' sympathy with the working class and the ideas of socialism, arising in his youth, found their opposition in a certain attachment he felt toward American bourgeois democracy. Hence the wavering which appeared at various stages in his life.

In 1922 Sinclair Lewis met the socialist leader Eugene Debs, to whom he had earlier sent a copy of his novel *Main Street* while Debs was in jail, and who, in his first encounter with Lewis, made a profound impression with his moral strength and stability. This is also the period when it first occurred to Lewis to write a novel devoted to the life of the working man. The writer spent many years thinking over the novel and read many books about the workers' movement, but even so he was still incapable of realizing his designs and in the end he gave them up. The only work where Sinclair Lewis concretely and sympathetically speaks of the proletariat is the essay (published as an individual brochure in 1929) called *Cheap and Contented Labor*, which deals with striking textile workers.

Lewis' sympathy toward socialism, which even in the twenties was quite diffuse, gradually disappeared and in the end came to nothing. He did not have enough knowledge of the material, and what is most important, did not possess the conceptual clarity to write a novel about the working class. But in his best works he does in his own way deal sympathetically with "simple people", regardless of the fact that his world outlook remained rather vague.

The central characters of Lewis' works are always taken from those social strata with which the author was well acquainted from his youth, with whom he had had personal contact or which fell under the range of his extensive literary and journalistic impressions. They are representatives of the working intelligentsia—doctors, jurists, those involved in commerce and even middle-class businessmen and politicians. But the working and exploited masses are in some form or other represented on the pages of his novels: the farmers and craftsmen treated by the provincial "Doc" Kennicott (*Main Street*) or by the young doctor Arrowsmith in the novel of the same name; the steel founders and construction workers of the city of Zenith, whom the respectable George F. Babbitt fears, and whom he tries to flatter in his demagogic speeches; the

prisoners whose fate Ann Vickers tries to make more tolerable through her naive reformist activities; or, finally, the oppressed Blacks with whom Neil Kingsblood, hero of *Kingsblood Royal* draws close and with whom owing to unexpected circumstances and the dictates of conscience he expresses his solidarity. The very nature of the milieu depicted by Lewis creates an essential distinction between his work and that of those American novelists whose heroes and plots are completely closed within the exclusive world of wealth and property (including the great and bitter novels about the life of the rich that were composed by F. Scott Fitzgerald). The life of the working class which constituted a majority of the population never became a primary theme in Lewis' novels. But in almost all his best works it was an open question, keen, vital, disturbing both the author and his heroes.

Lewis' novels most often have the same name as that of the central figure in the novel. And this was not simply a whim. The plots of these novels unfold as the history of an individual in his relations with society. Here the author is in part paying tribute to traditional American individualism: he was inclined to approach many problems and their resolution precisely from the point of view of a single individual with his spiritual needs, his fate and his views. At the same time this structural principle made it possible for Lewis to reveal more fully the inner world of his heroes.

A man comes face to face with life (or comes to some turning point in life). How does he bring his natural potential to realization? In what form will he interact—or has he interacted—with the surrounding world? Will he submit completely to the evil laws of the world of property or will he dare to hold his ground, to defend his searching, rebelling self? Or in the end will he find some sort of intermediate ground, some kind of compromise? Almost all of Sinclair Lewis' fundamental works, though varying in plot and occasionally completely dissimilar in their conceptual frame, are constructed as variations on the theme of the individual's conflict with

his environment. Often the conclusion is vague or conciliatory in nature, which reflects both the contradictory position of the writer himself, and at the same time the fact that the problems which his heroes face are not resolved by life itself.

The relationship between the individual and his environment has not only a social and moral aspect for Sinclair Lewis but also something more concrete and professional. The writer is convinced that each man must have his own occupation in life. (The drama of Carol Kennicott, the heroine of *Main Street*, is motivated not only by the fact that Carol cannot get along with the petty bourgeois of Gopher Prairie, but primarily because she has not found an occupation for herself which satisfies her soul and corresponds to her abilities.) It goes without saying that Lewis sees clearly the difference between sensible, creative work and empty, meaningless activity: the preacher Elmer Gantry and the political careerist Gideon Planish are plainly involved with the latter, not with real work. But be that as it may, Lewis portrays each of his heroes in that environment, that sphere of activity, which is connected with his type of work. And many of Lewis' novels, as critics have often noted, are a sort of sociological investigation from which one can learn much about the world of provincial "operators" (*Babbitt*), the state of science and health services in the United States (*Arrowsmith*), the women's movement and the penitentiary system (*Ann Vickers*), religious organizations and sects (*Elmer Gantry*) and so on.

No matter how unstable Lewis' world view or how susceptible to fluctuations, there was a definite complex of ideas which took shape in his mind while he was still young and to which he remained true through the various turning points in his life. His attitude toward capitalism was and remained critical (even though he did try occasionally to find sympathetic and reasonable representatives of the bourgeois). He was irreconcilably opposed to the greed and narrow-mindedness of men of property. He sharply condemned militarism and aggressive wars

and racial oppression in its various forms. He was quick to identify the class nature of fascism and was uncompromisingly opposed to it. He made a sober assessment of the darker aspects of the American political system, though he could not completely abandon his illusions regarding bourgeois democracy.

Sinclair Lewis was a fierce opponent of everything that might inhibit the individual. This in part explains why he did not accept organized forms of revolutionary struggle. At the same time, however, Lewis, championing the freedom of the individual took a passionate stand against the hypocrisy and falsity, against reducing a man to a common level, and he opposed standardization everywhere he found it.

Hence the birth of *Babbitt*, a novel about a "standardized" American.

The literature of critical realism, from Balzac to Dreiser, has often provided colorful portrayals of bourgeois figures—energetic, businesslike entrepreneurs capable of acting independently with style and initiative, but at the same time acting unscrupulously and without conscience. Mr. Babbitt is not altogether scrupulous himself. But in essence he is neither free nor *independent* in his actions. His businesslike mien is largely illusory.

Such a depiction of the bourgeois was new, not just for American, but for world literature. It is not surprising that progressive literary circles in the United States welcomed *Babbitt*. The novel was perceived as a literary discovery of sorts. The outstanding critic H. L. Mencken, who assumed a sharply anti-bourgeois position in the twenties, ended his review of the novel in the following manner: "In all these scenes there is more than mere humor; there is searching truth. . . . I know of no American novel that more accurately presents the real America. It is a social document of a high order."⁴

Sinclair Lewis speaks forthrightly and clearly about his hero: "...he made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford

to pay.”⁵ Thus from the very start Babbitt stands out as a social superfluity. We see Babbitt at various moments in his working day—dictating letters, pondering a report, closing a deal—and we become more and more convinced of the truth of the author’s initial characterization. In truth Babbitt does not create, and is incapable of creating values of any sort, whether material or spiritual. He is the representative of a class which, in the well-known words of the *Communist Manifesto*, at one time played a revolutionary role in history, but in the 20th century has abandoned its role as an organizer of production and in the main has been transformed into a parasitic and consuming class.

Babbitt, too, is depicted close-up as just this sort of person: a consumer, a man who possesses an enormous number of things which actually he does not need. The books in the house which nobody reads, the latest super custom-made cigarette lighter, and even the car—for Babbitt and his family these objects are significant above all in that they lend social prestige to their owners. And in fact “in the city of Zenith, in the barbarous twentieth century, a family’s motor indicated its social rank as precisely as the grades of the peerage determined the rank of an English family”.⁶

At a leisurely pace, with characteristically reserved and ironic intonations, the novelist describes the external appearance and behavior of his hero. Even in the laudatory epithets there lurks an element of censure which from time to time breaks out into the open. “The gray suit was well cut, well made, and completely undistinguished. It was a standard suit. White piping on the V of the vest added a flavor of law and learning. His shoes were black laced boots, good boots, honest boots, standard boots, extraordinarily uninteresting boots. . . . A sensational event was changing from the brown suit to the gray the contents of his pockets. He was earnest about these objects. They were of eternal importance, like baseball or the Republican Party. They included a fountain pen and a silver pencil (always lacking a supply of new leads)

which belonged in the righthand upper vest pocket. Without them he would have felt naked.”⁷ The reader sees more and more clearly that it is not Babbitt who owns things, but things that own Babbitt. He leads a contented life in wealth and comfort. But he has neither happiness nor freedom.

Babbitt, it would appear, is an extremely uncomplicated individual. But his psychological portrait is marked by flexibility and mobility. However poor in spirit he may be, however lacking in mental facility, Babbitt is vaguely dissatisfied with himself and with his life, and is trying somehow to change his mode of living. The first seven chapters of the novel devoted to one day in Babbitt’s life are in essence an exposition, a prologue. The real action of the novel unfolds in the succeeding chapters, where we witness Babbitt’s clumsy attempts to break the inertia of his standard existence—and the inevitable failure of these attempts.

Critics of various countries interested in Lewis’ novels have traditionally devoted attention to the internal dynamics of the image of Babbitt. The well-known Italian writer and anti-fascist Cesare Pavese, a translator and extremely perceptive critic of American literature, wrote the following as far back as 1930:

“Babbitt affects us precisely because he shows us how being an average man, a common man, a normal man, is like being a puppet. What reader of the novel, while reading it, has not every so often squirmed, asking himself how many times he himself has been a Babbitt?

“And, I repeat, the book’s greatness lies in the fact that Babbitt is restless, that Babbitt—in this respect more than ever Babbitt—does not want to be a Babbitt, and that all his efforts fail, leaving him terribly resigned, terribly good-natured, and ready to begin again. At a certain point, every cliché, every glad-handing phrase, every gesture, every ridiculous scene—and the reader knows how full of them the book is—becomes a barb which we see stuck in Babbitt, and he doesn’t notice, but from it his character emerges, tortured, quite stoic, and

still without heroism, the most common—and thus the most extraordinary—martyr the world has ever seen.”⁸

The word martyr, of course, is applied to Babbitt with a touch of irony, for his dreams of happiness, his pretensions to independence and freedom of thought, are in essence as destitute as he himself is: there is no real, profound dramatic tension in his experiences, nor can there possibly be. Nonetheless it is significant that Lewis does not make his hero a complete obscurantist and dimwit, but endows him with a measure of real human feelings: a genuinely friendly attachment to Paul Riesling, love for his son, and timid—oh, so timid!—gleams of critical consciousness. All this does not mean that Sinclair Lewis entertained secret feelings of tenderness toward Babbitt and Babbittry. Rather it signifies that the accusation inferred in the novel is directed primarily at the entire bourgeois class, and not at a single individual.

The most perspicacious readers of the novel, both in America and abroad, were quick to recognize the typicality of Babbitt. We ought to add to Cesare Pavese’s judgement yet one more testimony, that of a prominent West-European writer. Kurt Tucholsky, a well-known satirist and publicist writing in pre-Nazi Germany greeted the publication of *Babbitt* in German translation (1925) with an ecstatic review. “This is the most topical novel to come to my attention recently—it is totally a product of our times,”⁹ he exclaimed. Tucholsky noted the innovative literary devices employed by the novelist—the inclusion of expertly stylized business documents, notices, newspaper articles, an originally applied montage of short cinematic clips extending the frames of action. But what was most contemporary and most valuable in the novel, he affirmed, was the image of Babbitt himself. He saw in it something very much like the German philistine Wendriner, the personage he created for his own satirical feuilletons. “The Germans will laugh at this American. But Mr. Wendriner will never realize that he is also a Babbitt; that if one reproduced his notions, thoughts and current ideas benevolently and without commentary peo-

ple would also laugh; that values which he finds irrefutable and indestructible are just as absurd; that his Dresden Bank, his ball at the opera, his literature, symphony concerts, the electric apparatus in his apartment and his bargains are just as senseless and foolhardy as those of Babbitt.”¹⁰

Sinclair Lewis was the first to create a typical image, embodied in relief, of a life process which now, a half century later, is being pondered by many writers and sociologists in Western Europe and the United States: the depersonalization of the individual, the standardization of the tastes, opinions and behavior of people living in the capitalist world. And this process as delineated on the pattern of Babbitt becomes all the more convincing because the hero of the novel is not a marionette, not a conventional, hyperbolized figure, but a real, live man, drawn, as it were, from within, with concreteness and psychological authenticity.

In the course of the action the reader sees more and more clearly the mechanism whereby bourgeois society affects the individual. When Babbitt tries to break through the barriers surrounding him, and especially when he tries to avoid joining the so-called Good Citizens' League, his fellow townsmen, relatives, neighbors, business partners and church officials make a concerted effort to compel him, literally *compel* him, to “think things over”. His father-in-law and companion Henry Thompson unambiguously hints that if Babbitt does not join the Good Citizens' League the firm will be faced with failure and the family with ruin. Former friends avoid him.

Lewis' keenness of vision with respect to social matters is manifested with particular strength in the episodes devoted to the Good Citizens' League. He was among the first in world literature to discern, already in the twenties, the signs of fascism in the capitalist world, though he was thousands of miles removed from its birthplace in Mussolini's Italy. He revealed those specific national methods of activity and forms of ideological camouflage which served as a refuge for those organiza-

tions and groups of fascist cast in his own country. "All of them [members of the league] agreed that the working classes must be kept in their place; and all of them perceived that American Democracy did not imply any equality of wealth, but did demand a wholesome sameness of thought, dress, painting, morals, and vocabulary.... The longest struggle of the Good Citizens' League was for the Open Shop—which was secretly a struggle against all union labor."¹¹ It is only a small step from this sort of struggle to acts of political terrorism. "One evening a number of young men raided the Zenith Socialist Headquarters, burned its records, beat the office staff, and agreeably dumped desks out of the window."¹²

This was the beginning of the anti-fascist theme in Sinclair Lewis' work, one to which he returned ten years later, after Hitler's coup in Germany, developing it in his satirical novel *It Can't Happen Here*, and later, during the Second World War, in *Gideon Planish*.

Now, in the light of American and European historical experience, we can clearly see Sinclair Lewis' merits as one of the founders of anti-fascist literature in the capitalistic countries of the West. Contemporary European criticism also acknowledges the perspicacity of the author of *Babbitt*. The author of one of the most recent studies of Sinclair Lewis analyzes in detail the beginning of the novel's thirty-fourth chapter, where Lewis describes the Good Citizens' League, and the critic notes:

"As a prelude to the torture, imprisonments and executions which Europe would know in the next decade, these two pages are no less weighty than the entire novel *It Can't Happen Here*. In fact, the picture is complete, showing the economic basis of the dictatorship of the city's richest entrepreneurs joined by "prosperous citizens". The insidious paternalism which aims to conceal class antagonisms, intimidation, violent measures.... The dictatorship of the League of Good Citizens is shown by Lewis as the last avatar of a society which has long ago forgotten about the common man."¹³

The standardization of the individual, the transformation of society into a crowd of lonely souls, faceless and frightened, yielding easily to the ideological brain-washing of the powers that be—in the final analysis these things pave the way for fascism. And Sinclair Lewis was capable of seeing and conveying this fact almost half a century ago.

The author recognized that he had succeeded in saying something unique and important in *Babbitt*, and subsequently he often returned to the central character of his novel and made mention of him in his publicistic works. Lewis provided a satirically still more biting variation to the *Babbitt* motif in *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, a witty story in monologue form; here the central figure is Lowell Schmaltz, Babbitt's acquaintance and fellow countryman, a businessman from Zenith and an open reactionary. It is curious that Babbitt appears in one of the episodes in *Arrowsmith*; the sharp businessmen, self-satisfied and prosperous servants of the dollar and the standard who are broadly and diversely presented in the novel form a sort of background for the hero, the selfless, concerned, spiritually independent knight of science, Martin Arrowsmith.

In this novel as well the author's talent for satire revealed itself in full measure. We should recall that Maxim Gorky had high regard for Lewis as a writer who unmasked the evils of bourgeois society, and in this respect expressed a high opinion of *Arrowsmith*. In a letter to A. B. Khalatov written at the end of 1929, Gorky ranked Lewis first among the "writers of radical persuasion capable of illuminating in the brightest light various aspects of life in America and Europe". He singled out *Arrowsmith* and *Elmer Gantry* for special attention; "the first", he said, "gives an excellent portrayal of the charlatans of science, and the second—the charlatans of religion; these books merit the attention of the broadest possible audience".¹⁴

And it is true that *Arrowsmith* is merciless in its treatment of the "charlatans of science", those greedy men

who can turn practical medicine and any scientific discovery into a profitable business; one has only to recall the young surgeon Angus Duer, who while still a student "never squandered an hour or a good impulse", or Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh, the crafty healer, phrase-monger and rhymester who at the close of the novel is offered a ministerial post. Irony, satire, elements of the grotesque in the novel—as in other of Sinclair Lewis' best works, all this is organically included in an impeccably faithful reproduction of American reality in its social and private aspects. The mechanism which makes science and health care dependent on big business is presented tangibly and perceptibly with a thorough knowledge of the material at hand.

No less important in the novel is the character of the hero, who is spiritually close and dear to the author himself and who gains the most active sympathy of the reader.

It is clear that Sinclair Lewis, whose father, grandfather, uncle and elder brother were all doctors, incorporated many impressions of his youth, as well as stories related to him by family and friends, into the life story of Arrowsmith, especially in the early stages of the hero's life. It is also clear, on the other hand, that the belletrist and bacteriologist Paul de Kruif helped Lewis—in his introductory note to the novel the author expressed his gratitude to him. But we should take note of yet another probable literary source of *Arrowsmith* which has not yet received the necessary attention.

In 1943 Sinclair Lewis wrote the preface to an American edition of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. It is obvious that he first read this book not while working on the preface, but much earlier, just as he had read the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky in his youth.

Lewis speaks with great warmth of the author of *Fathers and Sons*: "His tenderness is too rare a thing to lose. . . . It is possible for us American extroverts to understand his characters, to smile at them, to love them."¹⁵

Further on in the preface Lewis describes Bazarov in

detail, and we can easily see how dear Turgenev's hero is to the heart of the American writer:

"The leading character, Bazarov, the medical student who believes more in test tubes than in faith and banners, stands forever as the type of all young radicals and innovators in all ages, with his harsh honesty, his youthful disgust with all institutions founded on profit and honorifics, his bad manners, his generous friendships, and his final betrayal by just the sentimentality to which he thought he was most superior. . . . In 1943 the story of Bazarov illuminates, just as it did in 1862, when it was published, a human puzzle that has always been fascinating and difficult. . . . His name is one of the few in fiction that lives on, like Quixote and Micawber and Sherlock Holmes, more immortal than all but a few actual personages."¹⁶

We do not intend to claim forthrightly that Lewis borrowed from the image of Bazarov when he was writing *Arrowsmith*. But Arrowsmith is also conceived by his creator as a type of young radical and innovator, bad-mannered and honest, despising money and titles, putting more faith in laboratory analysis than in dogmas.

In *Arrowsmith*, as in a number of other novels of Sinclair Lewis, American reality is presented expansively and graphically in its everyday flow and diversity and prose. But the image of the hero is enveloped in genuine poetry. The short prologue, where Martin Arrowsmith's great-grandmother as an adolescent girl courageously forces her way through desolate forests and swamps to the West, immediately announces the hero's kinship with the pathfinders and explorers whom Cooper and London described. And Martin's last name, Arrow-Smith, is not an arbitrary choice; it alludes to his impetuous nature and his working-class, plebeian origins.

Sinclair Lewis' favorite psychological theme of "man and his work" is handled in a way that was completely new to literature half a century ago. Lewis was one of the first to treat the life and work of a scientist. He clearly conveys the origin and development of Martin's research

interests, which grow out of his practical experience as a doctor, and the very process of his scientific investigations, prolonged, monotonous, intense, fatiguing and, in the end, a limitless source of joy.

Other writers were quick to follow the author of *Arrowsmith* in depicting the world of science; we should note in particular the novels of Charles Percy Snow, and we might also recall Dr. Antoine Thibault described by Roger Martin du Gard with profound insight into specific aspects of his work and thought. But it is important to realize that *Arrowsmith* describes not only the activities of a doctor and the process of scientific labor, but also concentrates on problems of a moral and philosophical character. The novel forces one to consider the social significance of science and the obligations and ethics of the scientist in contemporary world; in this sense it brings to mind such works as Brecht's *Galileo*, or the novel *The Russian Forest* by Leonid Leonov.

The philosophy of the novel is embodied above all in the figure of the prominent researcher Max Gottlieb, a man totally devoted to his work and a heroic, self-sacrificing individual. But there is yet another character in the novel, a character who in part recalls Gottlieb in his absolute selflessness and total dedication, and in part is set in contrast to him: this is Gustaf Sondelius. It is curious that both these scientists, each of whom plays a large role in Martin's life, are emigrants from Europe; this alone gives emphasis to the fact that they are aliens in the society where the dollar reigns.

Martin Arrowsmith learns much from Gottlieb, not only in a professional, but also in a moral, sense. He is deeply impressed by his teacher's sense of principle, his refusal to compromise, his complete dedication to science. Nonetheless Martin does not fully accept Gottlieb's philosophy, the spirit of dissension, the "faith of being very doubtful", a philosophy which dooms the scientist to solitude. For Martin science is not a goal in itself. He is attracted not only by the process of knowledge, discovery and truth, but also by the possibility of healing and sav-

ing people with the help of a newly discovered, though perhaps only relative, truth. And in this respect Arrowsmith, like the readers of the novel, feels great sympathy for Sondelius, who generously and spontaneously shares his knowledge and aid.

Those chapters of the novel which describe Martin's work on the island of St. Hubert, where a plague epidemic has struck, find the hero faced with complex moral problems. What is more important under these circumstances: the purity of a scientific experiment, which might determine the outcome of an important discovery, or the immediate help which the discovery might bring to thousands of people here and now? In the end Martin ignores the advice given him by his teacher Gottlieb to inoculate only half the population with the anti-plague vaccine in order to determine the effectiveness of this new form of medical treatment. Instead he follows Sondelius' advice and does not refuse the vaccine to anyone. Martin is not at all sure that he is acting rightly from the point of view of science's future development, but he cannot act otherwise.

In these chapters the character of Leora, Martin's devoted life companion, is revealed in a new perspective. She is drawn with great warmth and with great art—she is perhaps the most successful portrayal of woman in all of Lewis' work. In general this fierce opponent of philistine life and morals was inclined to support the women's emancipation movement and the right of women to choose their own profession: he already touched on this theme in his early novel *The Job*, and later it appeared in *Main Street* and *Ann Vickers*. Here, in *Arrowsmith*, and subsequently, the theme is treated somewhat differently. Leora Arrowsmith finds her life's meaning in helping her husband in every way, accompanying him like a true companion through all the vicissitudes of his career. For her there is no question but that she follow him in this dangerous expedition. And her death, though brought about accidentally, in its own way is no less noble a sacrifice than the death of Sondelius.

The episodes set on St. Hubert constitute the culmination of the novel: here its philosophical problems are dealt with conclusively, and here the dramatic tension of the plot reaches its zenith. Certain motifs here bring to mind Albert Camus' well-known novel *La peste*. Similarity can be seen in the devices which are used to outline the gradual spread of the plague and, in part, in the fact that both writers reveal the hypocrisy of the local authorities, who are afraid to acknowledge the plague for what it is and are therefore incapable of averting calamity. It is evident that for Camus, as opposed to Sinclair Lewis, the plague is not so much a concrete life phenomenon as a philosophical symbol which the author interprets in the light of his pessimistic philosophy. But be that as it may, both novels glorify the heroic actions taken to save human lives.

In the chapters on the St. Hubert plague another philosophical motif arises which is of principal importance in Sinclair Lewis' work. Martin Arrowsmith is surprised on seeing the black doctor Oliver Marchand: "Like most white Americans, Martin had talked a great deal about the inferiority of Negroes and had learned nothing whatever about them. . . . Then for half an hour did Dr. Arrowsmith and Dr. Marchand, forgetting the plague, forgetting the more cruel plague of race-fear, draw diagrams."¹⁷ The black intellectual was a figure hardly known in American literature at the time. Lewis' words about the plague of race-fear were based on profound conviction.

Twenty years passed and the theme of struggle against racial oppression took on new poignancy for American literature. In 1948 two very different novels appeared, both of them dedicated to this theme: William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* and Sinclair Lewis' *Kingsblood Royal*. Each of them reflects in its own way very real phenomena of life; the growth of self-consciousness among black Americans after the Second World War and at the same time the growth of sympathy toward the oppressed race on the part of the most conscientious white Ameri-

cans. In Lewis' *Kingsblood* we no longer witness the occasional appearance of an educated Negro, but in fact an entire group of colored American intellectuals who are fully aware of their worth and are ready to insist on their human rights.

Let us return to Arrowsmith. At the end of the novel he rejects a good position and a career in science and continues his experiments in an isolated laboratory in the woods. Here one can perceive the influence of Sinclair Lewis' favorite American author, Henry David Thoreau, who saw man's highest happiness in an environment of solitude and direct intercourse with nature (Sinclair Lewis never parted with his copy of *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, and often reread the work). How should we understand the finale of *Arrowsmith*? As a victory or as a defeat? The reader is justified in putting little faith in the freedom which the scientist might achieve in this original way. It would be useless to speculate on Arrowsmith's subsequent fate, either professional or personal. But at that moment when the action breaks off, Martin Arrowsmith feels himself more the victor than the vanquished. All things considered, he has not given in to the pressure of the charlatans of science, has not bowed down before all-powerful business and the many faces of philistinism. Twenty years later another straightforward and unsubmitive hero, Neil Kingsblood by name, would also refuse to yield to similar forces.

We are convinced that Sinclair Lewis' novels deal fully with keen human problems which have not lost their relevance in our day. These problems are deeply embodied in the images he fashioned and in the fabric of the plot. Already in 1931 Arnold Zweig, the well-known German novelist and admirer of Lewis' talent, expressed the following opinion: "His art is based on a criticism of the present world which unites us all. . . . The narrator stands behind his books; they are best when his personality is hidden and when this makes his message clearer."¹⁸ And indeed, in the best of Lewis' novels the author-narrator often comments on the course of action, tactfully

and unobtrusively. But apart from that he is so well integrated with his heroes that he becomes, as it were, inseparable from them. The rich philosophical content of his books is revealed naturally, in his own inimitable fashion, thanks primarily to the psychological fullness and richness of his characters. These qualities are evident both in *Babbitt* and in *Arrowsmith*, both of which have made a significant contribution to the development of world literature in the twentieth century.

NOTES

- ¹ *The Man From Main Street. A Sinclair Lewis Reader*, N. Y., 1953, p. 336.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 339.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 338.
- ⁴ *Sinclair Lewis, A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, N.Y., 1962, p. 22.
- ⁵ Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, N.Y., 1922, p. 2.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ⁸ Cesare Pavese, *American Literature. Essays and Opinions*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970, p. 17.
- ⁹ Kurt Tucholsky, *Panzer, Tiger und andere*, Berlin, 1957, p. 143.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-52.
- ¹¹ Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, pp. 391-92.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 392.
- ¹³ Robert Silhol, *Des tyrans tragiques. Un témoin pathétique de notre temps: Sinclair Lewis*, Paris, 1969, pp. 271-72, 277.
- ¹⁴ *The A. M. Gorky Archive*, Vol. X, Book 1, p. 177 (in Russ.).
- ¹⁵ *The Man From Main Street. A Sinclair Lewis Reader* (Preface to *Fathers and Sons*), p. 181.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 181, 182.
- ¹⁷ Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith*, N.Y., 1961, p. 354.
- ¹⁸ Arnold Zweig, "Improvisation über Sinclair Lewis", *Die Literatur*, Januar 1931, Heft 4, S. 186.

G. ZLOBIN

A STRUGGLE AGAINST TIME*

Russian readers have long been aware of William Faulkner's works. The Snopes trilogy—*The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*—, the novel *Intruder in the Dust*, *Sartoris* and his stories showed him to be a serious, original, complex artist who “on a postage stamp of native soil”—for most of his novels deal with a tiny county in the state of Mississippi known under the fictitious name of Yoknapatawpha—spent a lifetime assiduously chronicling not so much the tragedy of the American South as, it seemed to him, the tragedy of mankind.

Numerous critical works spare us the necessity of discussing at length Faulkner's contradictory view of the world, the peculiarities of his aesthetic system, and his difficult creative evolution. The scion of an aristocratic Southern family that had lost its former privileges; a self-educated man who hungrily absorbed whatever books fell into his hands; a secluded provincial and stubborn native who resolved to write in his own way as no one else wrote; laureate of the Nobel Prize, which put an end to his life as a recluse; and a universally acknowledged literary master who willingly consented to public appearances, lectures and interviews—Faulkner is a puzzle.

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zlingly attractive figure, a sombre colossus in twentieth century Western culture.

The Sound and the Fury which together with *Sartoris*, written somewhat later (both books were published in 1929), begins the Saga of Yoknapatawpha should by higher estimations be examined in concert with a dozen other novels and several collections of short stories which make up this monumental epic, whimsical, living tale that spreads across a century and a half. It tells how "a river quietly flows across a plain", which is the meaning of "Yoknapatawpha" in the language of the Chickasaw Indians who first dwelled in the area. But the conflicts between characters, revealing a contradictory play of prejudices, passions, motives, and interests are so frenzied and unexpected, the familial and social relations of aristocratic families, poor whites, Negroes, and the assertive newcomers from the North who gradually take everything in hand are so multi-faceted and confused, and Faulkner so scrupulously and subtly delineates the various branches of the county's history, colorfully recreating its physical milieu, that it is perhaps impossible to take in the whole enormous, multi-colored, fragmentary canvas at one glance. In addition, the writer does not stop to consider the reader. Having set himself the task of authentically reproducing the natural flow of all existence through time and space, at times violating chronological order and logical connections, Faulkner interrupts the narrative, shifting the action at times whole decades back, shuffling and fragmenting episodes, and meandering for long periods through roundabout plots. It is difficult to find some definite principle behind the composition and plots of Faulkner's novels on Yoknapatawpha.

The Sound and the Fury, where events are presented (up to the final twenty or thirty pages) through the eyes of a few characters is considered "an outstanding example of the interior monologue in our letters..."¹ by the authors of *Literary History of the United States*. This is the most extreme example of Faulkner's creative method. If Yoknapatawpha is a model of the American South, *The*

Sound and the Fury is a model of Faulkner's work. All the ingredients of Faulkner's touted, controversial art are included in this slim volume. Despite its temporal remoteness, the novel is contemporary in its style and problematics, and during the sixties was often referred to in discussions on the novel as a genre.

The reader, at least initially, must have a certain amount of courage, be very attentive to details and be patient enough to make sense of the story of the final fall of the Compson family—once wealthy and influential in Jefferson—and to uncover its artistic and social significance. Once he overcomes the muddy jumble of Faulknerian words and the mannered rhetoric characteristic of Southern prose, he strikes a golden vein of genuine talent moving from gothic depths to the actual truth of life and art. Then the reader is rewarded; before him unwinds the simple, largely true—to the most subtle psychological nuances—humanly penetrating story of unhappy people who acknowledge their own doom but cannot fathom the reason for their misfortunes or change their fate.

The heroes of this tale, told by Faulkner with sound and fury, are unique, and for each, the writer found a particular method of characterization.

Former lawyer Jason Richmond Compson has been driven to drink by unfulfilled ambitions and family squabbles. Aging, faint-hearted and skeptical, this stoical sophist is gradually selling pieces of the family estate.

Afflicted with largely imaginary illnesses, lonely and stoically (in her own words) bearing the family cross and the burdens of keeping up the household, Mrs. Caroline Compson prepares hourly to depart this world for another, better place. She has grown resigned to the fact that for the time being she must stay on this earth, however, and "Miss Cahline", as the Negro servants call her, spends what she believes to be her last days primarily guarding her former gentility.

Her brother Maury, the last male in the Bascomb line,

is a parasite and a true Southerner, capable of nothing more than affected posturing.

Quentin, the eldest Compson son, and hope of the family, was sent to Harvard. This conscientious, reflective youth is unable to protect his beloved sister from the encroachments of outsiders. Her innocence becomes a transparent symbol of family honor, and its loss drives him to suicide.

Candace, the Compsons' daughter—Caddy for short—is a charming, unaffectedly carnal being. Despite her brother's efforts, she forgets her virginal pride in the arms of a certain Dalton Ames, and in a last, despairing effort to patch things up is hurriedly married to a promising businessman from Indiana, Sydney Herbert Head. The latter breaks the bonds of matrimony, however, when his spouse presents him prematurely with a child, for which she is cursed by her fanatical mother.

Jason, the other Compson boy, is the only member of the family who is free of romantic self-delusions, illusions, and attachments. From early childhood his common sense and a healthy pragmatism are evident and after the suicide of his elder brother and death of his father, these qualities help him to feed the family and a half-dozen "lazy" Negroes on the meagre salary of a clerk. Jason considers the world a gathering of dolts and idlers, and stealing a little here and a little there, gradually prepares for his chance.

Candace's daughter is named after her Uncle Quentin. Raised without her mother, whose propensities she has nevertheless inherited, she repays her Uncle Jason's "generosity" with black ingratitude.

The Compsons' youngest son Maury, a mute, now "three years old thirty years", was renamed Benjamin at the age of five at the insistence of his mother who hoped that her youngest child would be as happy as the biblical Benjamin. But it would have been more accurate to name this idiot Benoni which means child of sorrow, the name given to the last offspring of Jacob. More than anything else in the world, Benjy loves the flame in the fireplace,

even though it burns, the meadow which the head of the family sold to a country club in order to send the eldest son to university and make a proper wedding for his daughter, and the warm Caddy, who smells of trees. He loves the sound of her name as the golfers summon "caddies".

The novel is structured in four parts: three take place during Easter, 1928, and one occurs eighteen years earlier.

Part one, titled "April 7, 1928", recounts the events of a day as perceived by the 33-year-old idiot, Benjamin. It is followed by the chapter "June 2, 1910" which conveys the feverish consciousness of Quentin, from early morning to the moment of his suicide. Jason narrates Part III, "April 6, 1928", and Faulkner takes over in the final part: "April 8, 1928". Thus the history of the Compsons is filtered through the consciousness of three family members, and then each of their subjective viewpoints is summarized and commented upon by the author.

The multitude of viewpoints by no means implies an endless revolution around a single subject. The four parts supplement one another; each in some way extends the novel's plot which is isolated in a complex spatial and temporal structure without much difficulty. Although it goes without saying that Benjy, Quentin, and Jason, returning to their past by way of memory, are pulled toward certain key episodes: the death of their grandmother in 1898, November 1900 (when Maury was renamed Benjamin), 15-year-old Caddy's first rendezvous (about 1906), the summer three years later when she lost her innocence, and Caddy's wedding on April 24, 1909.

To aid the reader as he reconstructs the chain of events, Faulkner usually marks a change of temporal planes with a few lines of italics. Originally he wanted to use different colored type to mark such transitions so that every layer of time, every episode, and every experience would have its own hue, so that "anyone reading it could keep up with who was talking and who was thinking this and what time, what moment in time, it was".²

But far more important than these superficial devices connected with the construction of the text are those lexical and artistic means by which the writer weaves together the threads of his characters' impressions and memories into a unified narrative canvas.

Let us examine the first pages of Part I more carefully. Benjy is out for a walk with Dilsey's youngest son, Luster. They slip through a hole in the fence. "You snagged on that nail again," says Luster in a temper. And through elementary association Benjy recalls another similar incident which occurred one Christmas, when Caddy helped him get free of a nail. Her warning not to get frost-bitten draws out another thread—the phrase: "It's too cold out there" spoken by Dilsey's eldest son Versh who was told to watch Benjy on the morning of that same day.

For the time being we cannot fix the year of that Christmas eve. But knowing that Benjy was born in 1895 (for today is April 7, 1928 and he is thirty-three), that the Compsons are still in force (for the house is filled with guests), that Caddy recently began school but was old enough to effectively defend the "baby" Benjy, we have reason to suppose that the action takes place early in at the turn of the century.

"You're not a poor baby. Are you. You've got your Caddy," the girl consoles her younger brother. But now, in April of 1928, Benjamin doesn't see his beloved sister and has begun to "moan" and "slobber" as Luster puts it. Together they continue past the carriage house where the carriage is. It has a new wheel. And once again there is an influx from the past: the carriage is being harnessed for a trip to the cemetery. Behind the coachman is the 18-year-old Negro T.P., son of old Dilsey, and Benjy can be considered his contemporary. Here we can not only establish the date of the event—1912—but are able to reconstruct other events in the family history from a series of details; old Compson and Quentin are dead, and things are going badly; the carriage is broken but Jason, the head of the family doesn't buy a new one; young

Quentin has appeared in his house; Roskus is more often plagued by rheumatism; T.P. has taken Versh's place, etc.

After a brief passage returning the reader to a cold Christmas and a short episode concerned with the romance of Uncle Maury and the Compsons' neighbor Mrs. Patterson, we find ourselves once again in the present. Luster allows the howling Benjy to wade in the stream, and a picture comes to him from his childhood when they all romped and splashed in the stream. That was in 1898, on the day that grandmother died. . . .

Even the most attentive and analytical of readers will not immediately catch many allusions, small details, seemingly incidental bits of dialogue, and unexpected scenes in Faulkner's prose monologue. Later these come into play and one realizes their importance as one gets accustomed to the complicated structure of the novel, gradually comprehending the nature and essence of the characters and their interrelations. This is most true of the second part of *The Sound and the Fury*, the internal monologue of Quentin reflecting his intellectual level, education and emotional experience.

American literary scholars have constructed a detailed chronology of events in the novel, elucidating the temporal shifts and connecting each unclear passage with a given period or event. While this is useful from a scholarly perspective, it hardly helps us to perceive the novel as an integrated, polysemantic structure. As in impressionistic painting, one must look at the work from a distance and assess not the individual brush strokes but their sum total, the way they are connected.

The novel's structure reflects the stoic struggle against time which Faulkner pursued on all levels, philosophically, historically, and linguistically.

The category of time is inherent in any artistic work. There is perhaps no great writer who has not attempted to arrest the moment, to capture something not subject to the sway of time, and Faulkner is no exception. In a certain sense a work of art is a frozen image of perpetually moving reality.

In the twentieth century writers began to sense time's presence more acutely, and even the most talented came to think of human existence as "lost time". This notion is clearly expressed in Proust's cycle *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Modernist writers considered time "man's only enemy", whose ceaseless flow decomposes and sweeps away all aspirations, efforts, and hopes; this gave rise to the contemporary philosophy of the absurd and the notion that the life of an individual, being finite, is senseless in the context of universal infinity.

The idea that man cannot break loose from the confines of time also occurs to Quentin's feverish mind when, after having failed to guard the family honor, he resolves to kill himself. He recalls his father's words: "Father said a man is the man of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune." Horrified at the thought that everything earthly passes on, that all is temporal, perishable, man takes the peaceablest words "*Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum*" to be the simplest formula that describes the cycle of an individual existence enclosed in negation at either end.

But Faulkner has his own theory on the subject: "...time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as *was*—only *is*. If *was* existed there would be no grief or sorrow".³ "...Also, to me, no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as *was* because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every moment."⁴ This implies that each man is a continuation of something; each accumulates all available personal and external experiences within himself; behind each man stands history. Faulkner's conception of the mobility and interrelation of "is" and "was" allow the artist great freedom to dislocate people and events in time. This also explains the convoluted Faulknerian sentence which strives for the impossible: to gather all layers of time at one moment in order to penetrate the most intimate mechanisms of the human psyche.

In a fascinating essay on the possibility of creating an artificial intellect, the Soviet physiologist, Academician Anokhin, examines the act of making a decision, one of the highest functions of the human mind. At such a moment the brain deals with multi-faceted information accumulated during the whole life's experience of the individual. This may be directly related to the technique employed by Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury*. Anokhin's notion that "the brain has become an organ that at each moment combines the past, present, and future within itself"⁵ corresponds to Faulkner's views on the continuum of time from the perspective of the subject.

Strictly speaking, "is" cannot exist without a source; there is no present in the absence of future. Here is one of the most vulnerable spots in the artistic conception of the novel. Although consciousness itself is movement and by nature requires projection into the future, the perceptions of Faulkner's characters lack "the silent power of the possible", as Heidegger calls it. Overwhelmed by the train of days and fateful circumstances, they are tragically incapable of asking how to live in the future. Not one Compson has a future, in the literal or figurative sense of that word. Even Jason, so caught up in his own machinations, is transformed into a slave of time. This gives rise to that focus on the past characteristic of Faulkner's heroes; after them rushes the author himself, trying to record their words and deeds.

In his essay "Time in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*" (1939), Sartre likened the novel's characters to a passenger in a speeding automobile who sits facing backwards. He does not see what *will be* ahead; he cannot determine what lies on either side of the road. Everything speeds past him losing its outline and form, drifting off in motion. Only things that are far away, that have moved backwards into *was* can be perceived by his frozen stare.

Faulkner's theory of time, his absorption in the categories of past and present as expressed in precarious formal experiments with prose monologues that at times

almost lose cognitive and expressive capacity, are based on his meditations over the historical fate of the South and his contradictory attitudes regarding the "Southern myth". No other American writer has spent as much energy propagandizing the legend of such a single civilization that thrived on patriarchal relations between magnanimous white masters and their devoted black slaves; no other writer has subjected that myth to such shattering, detailed criticism. His works contain an elegiac lament for the good old days—gone with the wind of the Civil War of 1861-1865—and a decided rejection of bourgeois relations based on clear self-interest, as well as a frightening consciousness of degeneration and inevitable change. He sees the South hysterically clutching at an illusory former greatness and the specific racial complex of being dependent on people of a lower order.

Somewhere Faulkner notes that every white Southern child is born nailed to a black cross. A person free of racial prejudice would take this to mean that the prosperity of each well-to-do Southerner is built on the blood and sweat of the blacks, on endless labors of Negroes in fields, gardens, backyards, kitchens, and nurseries. For Faulkner, the black cross—this original sin—is the white men's sometimes unsensed burden of guilt for subjugating Negroes to ordeals and privations, for trading in slaves; without slavery the old order could never have taken shape, but like a cancerous tumor it has eaten away at Southern society.

In *No Name in the Street* (1971) James Baldwin shares his own impressions and discoveries about the South made during a long visit there in 1957. Even he, a black man, was struck not by the silent heroism of Negroes "in the teeth of the Southern terror", for he had heard a lot about this, but by the spiritual emptiness and horror of the white citizens, the pathogenic moral climate: "...over all there seems to hang a miasma of lust and longing and rage". He makes one other interesting observation which helps us to view the nightmarish degeneration of the Compsos with contemporary eyes: "...Once I found myself

there, I recognized that the South was a riddle which could be read only in the light, or the darkness, of the unbelievable disasters which had overtaken the private life. . . . I felt as though I had wandered into hell."⁶

As Faulkner repeatedly stated, the novel sprung from his desire to write a story about children sent outside to play during the funeral of their old grandmother. Being young, they view the sorrowful ritual as something related to their games and cannot feel the profundity of the loss. In Faulkner's mind's eye arose a picture: "The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree, where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below."⁷

The naive spontaneity and limited, childish egocentricity that fascinated Faulkner could most clearly, as he saw it, be embodied in the figure of a retarded boy.

He wanted to tell this story from the viewpoint of a psychologically retarded child but soon became convinced that the story form was too narrow: "And so I told the idiot's experience of that day, and that was incomprehensible, even I could not have told what was going on them, so I had to write another chapter. Then I decided to let Quentin tell his version of that same day, or that same occasion, so he told it. Then there had to be the counter point, which was the other brother, Jason. By that time it was completely confusing. I knew that it was not anywhere near finished and then I had to write another section from the outside with an outsider, which was the writer, to tell what had happened on that particular day."⁸

As he worked on the tale, he conceived the symbol of the muddy drawers and the image of the little girl on the pear tree was supplemented by another: a hunted girl, deprived of mother and father who climbs down a tree outside her window and runs from a home where she finds neither sympathy, understanding, or love. Thus Quentin not only appeared but became part of an image

signifying "a tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter".⁹ This was Faulkner's description of the novel's theme. If one recalls the exorbitant cult of the unapproachable and at the same time sociable *belle dame*, the Southern lady, which has long reigned in the realms of this slaveholding aristocracy, and takes into account Faulkner's observation that the book "was going to be a story of blood gone bad", the author's description of his theme does not seem so terribly limited.

One can witness the extremes to which this cult leads, at least in advanced age, in the figure of Caroline Compson, a quarrelsome fanatic, an egoist who drives her daughter from her home and forbids the very mention of her name.

In calling *The Sound and the Fury* a novel of "stream-of-consciousness" we must not forget that this is a conventional term and may obscure the various perspectives and characters. The three parts of this book narrated by the Compsons manifest three types of consciousness: the undeveloped, naive, immediate, preverbal consciousness of Benjy; the romantic-metaphysical consciousness of Quentin, burdened with ontological and ethical categories (being, honor, sin); and Jason's pragmatic, vulgar, purposeful consciousness aimed solely at achieving his own ends.

Benjy's part is a series of pictures, some more or less detailed, others flashing briefly past like lightning; they arise on the level of sensation and photographically fix things around him—conversations, physical forms, odors, colors—forms of the sensual world. Flashes of memory sometimes evoke voices, movements, images from the past. But since time has lost its sequence for Benjy, these all exist in one "Here and Now".

It is said that the most vivid impressions are those of childhood. Most often Benjy's memory flashes back to the moment of his grandmother's death on that day in 1898, or more precisely on that evening when the children are taken to the kitchen for dinner and told not to make noise. They see their father's anxiety and hear their

mother's weeping and feel that misfortune has come to their home. These fifteen or twenty flashbacks (out of more than sixty) combined with a series of later episodes constitute the initial plan for a simple, plaintively poetic story about children who, with their innocent pranks, quarrels, cares, and games stand on the threshold of that incomprehensible almost alien tragic and farcial grown-up world where good coexists peacefully with evil, where idly unrestrained passions soundlessly reach a boiling point and invisible dramas of selfishness and vindication are played out. The latter are far more vivid than the shows staged by travelling circus actors who come to Jefferson at Eastertime, because people, as old Compson taught his children, "...are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not".¹⁰

Benjy's confused chain of pictures and recollections is also a chain of losses endured by that unhappy, defenseless creature. Retarded from birth, he lost his name at the age of five; as Dilsey puts it, "Folks dont have no luck, changing names". He senses that Caddy, the object closest to his affections and his champion, has ceased to smell of trees; now she has the odor of perfume. He searches out her eyes that avoid his, and after her wedding searches for Caddy herself; he sees that his grandmother, Quentin and his father disappear and do not return. "He know lot more than folks thinks," says Roskus. "He knowed they time was coming, like that pointer does." The more frequent, the bitterer the loss, the more despairingly Benjy begins to seek out people, not people at home, they are no longer up to caring for him, but golfers, school children, who pass the gate where he weeps and vainly looks for the departed Caddy. The fence, along whose length Benjy runs howling, and his muteness symbolize the tragedy of those beings who are partitioned off from the world and have no hope of overcoming this condition. Dostoyevsky's Prince Myshkin "suf-

fered deeply and mutely" because "only he understands nothing, neither people, nor sounds; he was like something that had been thrown aside, an abortion, alien to everything". In the same way Faulkner's idiot tries to express himself and cannot: "I tried to say, but they went on, and I went along the fence, trying to say, and they went faster. Then they were running and I came to the corner of the fence and I couldn't go any further, and I held to the fence, looking after them and trying to say."¹¹

Benjy wishes to be understood; he is starved for companionship; he wants to take part in the world, to break the wall of isolation: "I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. . . ."¹² The local residents take this for an attempt to assault the young girl, and her older brother metes out bestial punishment to the seventeen-year-old Benjy. Castration is the final indignity that one can inflict upon a man before death. Perhaps in the image of this mutilated character in whom "all time and injustice and sorrow became vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets" Faulkner's humanism is most fully expressed: his bitter sympathy for the victims, his appeal for people to realize how circumstances may ruin a life.

In choosing a name for the original tale about Benjy, Faulkner thought of taking Macbeth's words from the fifth act of the tragedy. Later this title was given to the novel, and the monologue spoken by Shakespeare's hero on time's inexorable progress became an emblem of the Compsons' doom, of the vain efforts of Quentin, who most keenly experienced the family tragedy, and of the increasing inability of the Southern code of honor to stop the course of things:

*Life's but a walking Shadow, a poor Player,
That struts and frets his hours upon the Stage
And then is heard no more. It is a Tale
Told by an Idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.*¹³

Quentin's philosophical reflections on the brevity and illusoriness of human existence, borne away by the stream of time, are transformed into three concrete leitmotifs which haunt his last day on earth: clocks, shadows, river. From early morning, the pealing of the tower clock's chimes remind Quentin at fifteen minute intervals of the time left before the fatal step. It is the final gesture, the final challenge to time and circumstance: "I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on."¹⁴ A clock without hands is a universal symbol not so much of worldly vanities, but of the impossibility of living on past ideas and vanishing establishments, of "turning the clock back almost a century", in the words of Carson McCullers' character in *Clock Without Hands* which show that the roots of historical and social illusions, of racial prejudices and superstitions among Southern whites are deep indeed. Quentin's hours are numbered, the Compsons' time is running out.

The youth wanders about Cambridge and its environs, and everywhere, like a portent of death, his shadow follows close on his heels. At times it stretches ahead of him, at times it disappears behind him, at times he steps on it, trampling it into the ground, or it jumps from a bridge and lays itself along the water, but he cannot break free of it, cannot escape from it, cannot drawn it even with the help of a pair of six-pound irons. . . .

Benjy's pictorial recollections have the nature of objects. He "speaks", as a rule, in short phrases containing concrete information. Stylistically, Quentin's section is richer and more complex; his reflective speech is full of metaphors and associations. Suddenly, in the midst of the comparatively measured, even deliberately retarded flow of the day's impressions come the waves of the past, bringing resentment, bitterness, and guilt. At this point the narration becomes fragmentary, unconnected, breath-

less. Sentences are hurried and lose their endings; overcoming the obstacles of punctuation, they run into each other, flow in time, whirl into a despairing *forte*, then suddenly subside into the faintest *pianissimo*.

Quentin has certain obsessions. He is devoured by the flame of a more than brotherly love for Caddy, by insane jealousy, a thirst for revenge, and hatred for a world where "he'll have to get his the best way he can because he'll find everybody else is doing the same thing", as his sister's bridegroom explains with utter frankness. He cannot stop thinking of the amorous delights and marriage of Caddy implicit in the scent of honeysuckle. His inflamed brain echoes with the words: "Did you ever have a sister?", "Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames...", "Father I have committed...". To save the Compson honor, atone for his sister's sins, and "...isolate her out of the loud world", he is ready to take upon himself the greater sin of incest, so that just the two of them, passing through disgrace and torment, could in the end be purified in hell-fire from the earth's filth. Everything that Quentin did, experienced, and endured becomes shadowy, "taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance". In contrast and counterpoint to Quentin's phantasmagorical visions appear scenes and people from the external world, these acquire an objectivity that is more characteristic of the author than of his hero. Among these are Quentin's friends from the university. A fight with one of them, Gerald—the owner of an "unchallenged peripatetic john of the late Confederacy"—corresponds to a fight between Quentin and Dalton Ames, defiler of his sister. A short story about boys with fishing rods and trout which they have been trying to catch for twenty-five years, is also inserted, thematically and stylistically recalling Hemingway, in particular—the Old Man and his fight to land the Big Fish. Another such episode introduces a dirty, starving, young Italian girl who, like a homeless puppy, attaches herself to Quentin on the street, forcing him for a time to tear his thoughts away from himself and look upon the sorrow and nobility incarnated in her brother

who rushes to save the girl from the outsider. This episode, counterpointed with flashes from the past, plays an important part in the novel's structure. It makes Quentin feel all the more acutely his own guilt at not having saved his sister from a fall and takes up the theme of incomprehensible motives initiated with Benjy. Most importantly, it lifts the curtain just enough to give us a glimpse at a human drama that differs from that of the Compsons, the drama—perhaps even more cruel—of unfortunate immigrants.

Despite the complexity of Benjy and Quentin, both remain conventional characters; one expresses naïveté and purity, the other passion and conscience. Jason, although his cruelty and evil are generalized traits, is a totally realistic character. The vulgar prosaism of his nature is evident in his assessment of his family's misfortune: one is crazy, another drowned himself, the third was driven out by her husband. This was the same husband who had promised him a job at the bank, the sort of break that happens once in a lifetime. And when his sister, the whore, ruins his hopes for the promised position, all his bitterness and resentment of insane relatives, lazy Negroes, brazen New York Jews whose machinations in the stock market rob the people, the government ("Let it wash a man's crop out of the ground year after year, and them up there in Washington spending fifty thousand dollars a day keeping an army in Nicaragua or some place"), and the world descends on the shoulders of his niece. Eighteen years ago Caddy's escapades caused a tragedy. The quarrel between Jason and Quentin lowers this to the level of a farce.

Unable to think in abstractions, Jason, with each sentence of his extended conversation with himself, shows himself to be not so much dull or limited as petty, primitively resourceful, self-interested to the point of insanity. The third part, where the satirical tendency of the novel comes to light, is a compilation of the shopkeeper's negative values, the "gospel" according to Jason for whom there exists neither God, nor the devil, nor any

other man, but only business, and therefore like a true philistine he notes others' weaknesses, flaws, sins, and vices. He speaks in the language of the provincial man-in-the-street, biting and pithy with slang and dialectisms. He understands nothing that does not correspond to his notion of life as accumulation. He is capable of burning tickets for the circus before the eyes of a boy who lacked the five cents to pay for them, of extorting a hundred dollars from his own sister for showing her young Quentin through the window of the speeding carriage; "And so I counted the money again that night and put it away, and I didn't feel so bad," he says following the incident.

Despite obvious overtones of naturalism, Faulkner himself later explained the decline of the Compsons simply and precisely: "They are living in the altitudes of 1859 or '60." Jason is the sole male Compson to survive; he survives because he rejected all that is Compson and became like the Snopes, pushy, unscrupulous, greedy moneygrubbers who for Faulkner personify an inhuman, commercial civilization.

In 1946, while preparing the latest edition of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner added an appendix: "Compson 1699-1945". Having commented on the characters' genealogy, he sets the rise and fall of the Compsons in the context of the development of the American South. Here we also find out the fate of some of the Compsons, in an excerpt beyond the frame of the novel itself. In 1933 (is this date deliberate?) Jason sent Benjy to an asylum, drove away the Negroes (" 'In 1865,' he would say, 'Abe Lincoln freed the niggers from the Compsons. In 1933, Jason Compson freed the Compsons from the niggers.' "), sold the house, moved into the shop that had become his own, and became an influential cotton merchant. Faulkner then lifts the thin, romantic veil from Caddy. In 1943 she is identified in a magazine photograph, "ageless and beautiful", seated in the deluxe limousine of a German officer. And it was understood that "Caddy doesn't want to be saved hasn't anything

anymore worth being saved for nothing worth being lost that she can lose". Nothing is known of Quentin other than the fact that "whatever occupation overtook her would have arrived in no chromium Mercedes. . .".

The novel's pessimism would be overwhelming were it not for the colorful figures of the Negroes whose steadfast patience and quiet consciousness of human responsibility stand in relief against the background of the Compsons' degeneracy: the wise, long-suffering Dilsey, her husband Roskus, her children Frony, Versh, T.P., Luster's grandson. Faulkner's book is not about them, but: "They come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope. . ."¹⁵ Dilsey's morning housecleaning is so precisely detailed and the Sunday service at the Negro church, where "hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures", in all its brightness and solemnity so warmly described in the same time frame that Jason is furiously pursuing his runaway niece and the seven thousand dollars, that it seems the author's objective view on events taking place behind the peeling façade of the Compson home correspond to the views of the Negroes. The author's voice blends with that of Dilsey: "...I've seed de first en de last. . ." And if at times the Negroes seem stereotyped, nevertheless "love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice"¹⁶ are passed on to them. These are the highest, simplest human qualities of which the writer spoke in his Nobel Prize address, and which the Compsons, through their own weakness of character and through circumstance, gradually lose. Faulkner concludes his enumeration of the Negro characters in the appendix with Dilsey's name, followed by a brief epitaph: "They endured."

Although Faulkner had not yet read *Ulysses* at the time he worked on this novel, it is generally accepted that *The Sound and the Fury* evolved from Joyce's work. One can hardly deny that there are similarities between the two works, most obviously in the use of "stream of consciousness". But Faulkner categorically repudiated at-

tempts to find mythological or religious symbolism in his novel, while *Ulysses* easily fits into such interpretations. But if one seeks a tradition one must go back a hundred years to the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. The mysteries and horrors lying in wait for Poe's heroes from all sides have, in Faulkner's works, migrated into the human soul. Twain's comic element and the echo of his sarcastic laughter also sounds throughout the pages of Faulkner's books. Finally one must mention a school of "southern" novelists known in this country by works of Robert Penn Warren, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor.

In style and structure, *The Sound and the Fury* is an experimental, polyphonic work. "It is a novelist's novel—a whole textbook on the craft of fiction in itself,"¹⁷ writes Conrad Aiken. Without concealing its construction, it remains a finished work of art. One can imagine the labors of the Russian translator, O. Soroka, who was obliged not only to recreate four individual types of speech, but to unify them without losing the color and polysemantics of the Faulknerian word. The Russian translation of *The Sound and the Fury* is an outstanding event in the history of the art of translation in the Soviet Union and deserves extensive treatment in itself.

The attentive reader will no doubt observe how from one part to the next the style grows simpler, how the capricious temporal-spatial skeleton of the novel accumulates living verbal flesh, how the characterizations grow more specific, and, finally, how the biological curse threatening the Compsons takes on social and psychological dimensions. Taken as a whole the four parts of the novel show a microcosmic picture of Faulkner's development into a realistic writer.

NOTES

¹ *Literary History of the United States*, ed. by Robert F. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, N.Y., 1957, p. 1305.

- ² *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Sound and the Fury"*, ed. by Michael H. Cowan, New Jersey, 1963, p. 15.
- ³ *William Faulkner, Three Decades of Criticism*, p. 82.
- ⁴ *Faulkner in the University*, N. Y., 1965, p. 84.
- ⁵ *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, July 11, 1973.
- ⁶ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, London, 1972, pp. 65, 54-55.
- ⁷ *William Faulkner, Three Decades of Criticism*, p. 73.
- ⁸ *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Sound and the Fury"*, pp. 14-15.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ¹⁰ William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, N. Y., Random House, p. 130.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- ¹³ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, N.Y., 1963, p. 335.
- ¹⁴ William Faulkner, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- ¹⁷ *William Faulkner, Three Decades of Criticism*, p. 141.

M. LANDOR

FAULKNER'S CREATIVE METHOD IN THE MAKING*

1

On the occasion of William Faulkner's first interview in New York (1931), the interviewer quoted Arnold Bennett, whose opinion of the young novelist was already widely known: "He writes like an angel." This only stressed the difference between the standards of the Oxford artist and those of the reporter. Indeed, for all Faulkner's international reputation, he has stubbornly failed to conform to many standards, including those of enlightened liberals. His internal evolution continues to provoke discussion, and diametrically opposed opinions are voiced as to his humanism and his entire literary corpus.

Let us first consider the judgements of three liberal authorities, all of whom differ in their interpretations of Faulkner. Thomas Munro, in an essay on contemporary pessimism, saw an enormous gap between the constructive sentiments expressed in Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech and the prose which has changed little from *Sanctuary* to *A Fable*. Writes Munro: "...in his stories the element of good is at a minimum, while his outstanding powers of dramatic narrative and colorful imagery

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are used to build up a total impression of man as filthy, stupid and malicious".¹

Maxwell Geismar contrasts the brief blossoming of Faulkner's work with his extended creative decline from the late thirties to his death. In the humor of *The Hamlet*, Geismar sees a hatred of life; he considers *Requiem for a Nun* "absolutely worthless". Geismar links Faulkner's creative decline with the artist's "contempt for all phases of modern life".²

In his book *Waiting for the End* (1964), Leslie Fiedler begins with a series of paradoxes pronouncing the author an essentially humorous writer who naturally enough came to parody himself.

There are various trains of thought here, but in each case Faulkner, deprived of his creative dynamics, loses hopelessly and comes out looking like a writer devoid of spiritual depth. On the other hand, European anti-fascist writers generally perceive Faulkner as an extremely dynamic writer.

Faulkner's novels written in the late twenties have long been evaluated in the light of subsequent history; they became an integral part of the post-war period. While there is unity in his works they also strike one as being unfinished. In his last years he set himself maximal creative tasks, not hesitating to re-examine earlier accomplishments.

His later works are most familiar to us. They continue to be translated and to inspire commentary. Recently, well known novels written before *The Hamlet* have been discussed in detail (see, for example, N. Anastasyev's essay in *Uoprosy Literaturny*, 1970, No. 11).

In analyzing these novels, critics arrive at dissimilar, at times clearly polemical conclusions. It is precisely the growing diversity of such Faulkneriana that allows the reader to form a more concrete notion of the writer's creative path. Here we might also turn to those formative years so vital to his career. Faulkner's earliest works have been republished in the United States, his essays, speeches, and interviews collected. Gradually it has become clearer

how he arrived at his artistic principles and what allowed him, while remaining true to himself, to change with changing developments in history.

2

In 1947, looking back on his youth, Faulkner said: "Wider view is not caused by what you have seen but by war itself."³ It was his lifetime conviction that the European war, experienced as a world crisis, illuminated each tiny corner of the world in a new way. These words also refer to his own life. Faulkner's reader will find it hard to believe that he never got to the front, not having finished his training in the British airforce, for he writes of war with the power and precision of a participant. For decades his thoughts dwelt on the France of 1918 where his brother was gassed and wounded. Even in speaking of the aesthetic ferment which followed the war, he linked the artist's horizons with those of the frontline soldier. The spirit of unrest, said Faulkner at the close of his life, was inherited by American artist-expatriates from those soldiers who saw "strange lands" and "strange customs" beyond the seas.⁴

The young pilot who returned to Oxford from Canada did not become an expatriate, but developed in an aesthetic atmosphere identical to that of the expatriate writers. In his early essays and verses, contemporary madness was contrasted with the world of beauty. His musical poems manifested the rejection of reality as his dramatic experiment *Marionettes*. His essays brimmed with caustic remarks addressed to the philistine public. Behind the fervor and mockery of the rebel lay foreshadowings of Yoknapatawpha. In one essay of 1922, he asserted that "...art is preeminently provincial",⁵ that is it belongs to a particular century and place. By way of example, he cited the plays of Shakespeare. In another essay he insisted that Americans have the richest contemporary language.

One is struck at how much of Faulkner's early efforts remains in his mature work. In 1919, after the appearance of his poem *L'Après-midi faunne*, he also published a bitingly humorous story about Canadian cadets (*Landing in Luck*). In 1925, among his sketches of New Orleans, Faulkner published the *Sunset*, a story well known here about a victimized Negro with a childlike dream of Africa, showing the primitive mores of Louisiana. No matter how far the young poet retreated from reality, he still saw it clearly, and in his own way. After he turned to prose, his style continued to reflect the imagery and poignancy of romantic poetry. His novels retain a bond with the most varied aesthetic structures, with the oldest classics and the most modern works.

Soldiers' Pay (1926), his first novel, marked a turn from exotic themes back to his native South. He returned with the soldiers who could not find a place in prosperous America. In one scene they cluster in a corner during a dance, pathetic and forgotten in the midst of feverish gaiety. Faulkner himself illustrated the students' editions, deftly caricaturing the polished Babbitts; and in the novel he too showed the typical oblivious crowd of the dance halls. The comparison seems all the more bitter in this milieu: the poor abandoned soldiers feel like provincials in "the comparative metropolitan atmosphere", crowded to one side by the madness and triumph of big business.

Faulkner, long familiar with the smallest details of the South where he grew up, already, at times, saw it as a strange land. In his native haunts he perceived an eternal, oriental stasis, and subsequently an ancient Nemesis which pursued those who had defiled the land with the curse of slavery.

Leading American realists marvelled at this son of Mississippi, this Southerner with a new, critical outlook. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech (1930), Sinclair Lewis remarked that Faulkner "has freed the South from hoop-skirts". In Dreiser's eyes, the author of *Sanctuary* represented a new genuine American literature and a generation of Southerners who had replaced

the worn-out traditions with a healthy, direct, modern approach. But Faulkner's modern, critical attitude could not be divorced from his fresh acceptance of those traditions which had retained their meaning, and this distinguished him among the post-war generation of Southerners. Toward the end of his life, in a speech at the University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson, the writer called upon his audience to follow the humanitarian principles of the great enlightener, and to return to his spiritual legacy. Gavin Stevens, a constant figure in Faulkner's work, is a contemporary democrat who embodies this spiritual legacy. Faulkner continuously shifts from the suffocating fragrance of magnolias to the snow-filled university town to show contrasting ways of life, upbringing and culture. Characterizing Northerners and emigrants from the North, he relies on the rebellious books of Northern romantics. It is not surprising that in his library, next to the first edition of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*, stood Van Wyck Brooks' *The Flowering of New England*.

The unusual Faulknerian South owes still more to the literature of the Midwest. In his later years the writer's thoughts often dwelt on Dreiser's Indiana, with its sorrows and aspirations as expressed in *Sister Carrie*. He also recalled Lewis' satire on the standardized town of Zenith. For Faulkner found this to be "provincial" art in the highest sense of the word—not local, but all-American. It is curious that while in his early essays he writes with some irony of Carl Sandburg's prosaic and openly tendentious verse, decades later, in 1955, he calls Sandburg a genuinely American poet. The novelist from Mississippi, maintaining that he was not a literary man but a farmer, associated himself with those who had experienced the twentieth century drama of change and frustration occasioned by the pressure of capital.

Sherwood Anderson, who so skillfully depicted this drama in Ohio, also belongs among these writers. But for both the young and the mature Faulkner he is unique. In his short stories local events take on universal signif-

icance. He demonstrates not only what American prose was at the time, but what it might become. Faulkner boldly compares Anderson in this respect to the Europeans. In his essay "Sherwood Anderson", published in 1925 in the *Dallas Morning News*, Faulkner recalls Balzacian heroes to show the novelty of the grotesque father in *A Story-teller's Story*: "I don't recall a character anywhere exactly like him—sort of a cross between the Baron Hulot and Gaudissart."⁶

In 1955, during a visit to Japan, Faulkner, speaking for his generation, first said that Anderson "showed us the way".⁷

Learning the lesson of creative independence from Anderson, Faulkner had his own approach to the other author's experiments. In the same essay he aptly criticizes *Many Marriages*. Rejecting this new prose which dispensed with social antagonism and humor, Faulkner worked out his own concept of the experimental novel. To follow Anderson's lead meant for Faulkner to create "a cosmos in miniature",⁸ to find a wealth of figures and dramas in his native land which could compare with those of the European classics. Faulkner was quick to assert his artistic self-determination and take this path.

His early novels contain much that is typical of his creative world: sharply delineated figures, shading, poetic speech. His picture of the South in *Soldiers' Pay* includes a court and a Negro church; controversy about life with quotations from the classics are coupled with soldier slang that grates against well-bred ears. *Mosquitoes* (1927) is about an outing on a yacht among a motley New Orleans group. It is a humorous depiction of endless discussions about art, of the artistic pretensions of the talented and their worshippers. Ironizing over the trivial bombastic verse which he himself once had written, he found his element in models of reckless, alogical "wild humor". His mockery spares neither the respectable nor the bohemian, nor does it refrain from satirizing their grotesque convergence. As his world-wide reputation grew, these novels were more frequently approached as a means

of entering his creative world. Time helped to see them in other perspectives. *Soldiers' Pay* was first translated in many countries after 1945; it was a voice from the past directed to the present. *Mosquitoes* took on new pungency following the post-war boom as a book about the Jazz Age, so close in time and yet already "history". *Sartoris*, which marked the end of his literary apprenticeship, appeared with this dedication: "TO SHERWOOD ANDERSON through whose kindness I was first published, with the belief that this book will give him no reason to regret that fact."

Sartoris was the beginning of the chronicles of Yoknapatawpha County. Usually this novel about the waning Southern aristocracy is seen as a sketch of Faulkner's universe, a study for many pictures which he later painted. But we also find here those contradictions which characterize Faulkner as an epic artist; these are not confined to his early work. In this novel of generations, history appears in gaps and breaks. The spectre of Southern army Colonel John Sartoris—ominous and real to the local citizens—recalls ancient times. The marks of his teeth on a pipe are likened to traces of gigantic extinct fossils. His great-grandson Bayard, returning from the European war, incarnates the speed and despair of the present. He rides about in his racing car, tormented by the thought of his twin brother who perished absurdly in the war, and is himself killed while testing a new plane. Faulkner explained that he was not interested in the decades preceding 1914 when he wrote *Sartoris*. For Americans this was an optimistic period, devoid of drama ("nothing was happening"⁹). Of course the World War gave Faulkner a sense of something Shakespearian; it was "a time out of joint". It cast a harsh light on the drama of the past and on the ignominious end of the aristocracy in the present. Focusing on decades in the life of the South, Faulkner remained in familiar territory, an environment increasingly doomed, losing its grasp of reality. Only people belonging to this small circle were given independent roles. But Yoknapatawpha could be created only when

he had stepped beyond the boundaries of this small circle and could see it from a distance, when the uninterrupted history of the South became for him much broader than the broken, fading history of the Sartorises. Faulkner's epos could not have unfolded had not the figures of black and white outcasts of the South, poetically equal, entered into his novels. The writer's development is linked with these figures, with their solidity and realistic views on things. Striving to perceive the truth about history, from the thirties up to the publication of *The Mansion*, he continued both to supplement and to critically re-examine the earlier narrated history of the Sartorises. At the same time he viewed the publication of this novel as a landmark. For the rest of his life he would chronicle that his "own little postage stamp of native soil", and sublimate "the actual into apocryphal".¹⁰ In the same year, 1929, appeared *The Sound and the Fury*.

In connection with this book, so unusual in structure, European critics began to investigate the role of time in Faulkner's work with particular persistence. While his concept of time was formed in the earlier novels, the problem continued to disturb him throughout his life and he addressed himself to it to the last. The point of departure here was a negation of the measured gait of progress and of dead inert existence, of a dull life reflecting the bourgeois notion that nothing had happened after the European hecatomb. When he repeated that for him there is only "is" and no "was", he was speaking of an "is" where "was" is still alive, which corresponds to all dramatic epochs since legendary times, where significant moments experienced by each generation of the inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha County converge and collide.

One cannot evaluate the scale of Faulkner's thought without understanding his humanism. The same is true of the contemporary conditions of human existence which he portrays.

For the European reader, Faulkner's South, beginning in the thirties, with its images of violence and of conformity, of impotence and bigotry, suppression of indi-

viduality and morality, became the artistic model of the century. This was how the cruel world of Yoknapatawpha was perceived in the years of Nazism and even in the time of the cold war. But readers and critics often did not realize that the present cruelty was not final for Faulkner. He used the word "ephemeral"¹¹ to describe contemporary conditions, without resorting to the existential connotations of immutability and exclusiveness. It stands to reason that he spoke as an artist, with no pretensions to the role of an ideologist. His judgements on general themes were most justified when based on his own experience. With the bluntness of a farmer, the writer accuses "capitalism" of plundering the nation's resources. Having inherited the Jeffersonian concept of the state, he was able to judge the centralized bureaucracy, McCarthyism and the FBI independently. But even in America there was much beyond the limits of his experience and this became evident when he took it upon himself to judge the demonstrations of the Black and student protests. A prejudice against mass movements remained with him to the very end. The Communist Linda who appears in his Yoknapatawpha County remains a person from another world. The writer himself readily confessed in subsequent speeches that he knew little about "ideas", this, of course, also applied to socialism. In general, the political horizons of Faulkner, with his lofty spirit and prejudices, were typical of the enlightened Southerner. He was simply more distant from political problems than his European admirers who had gone through the school of the Resistance. However to this somewhat exaggerated claim that he knew nothing about ideas, Faulkner added, and not without purpose, that he did know of people "in motion".¹² It was on this that he based his humanistic conviction that the present is transient. It was a dissonant note among many despondent, weary voices of the Western intelligentsia.

Though Faulkner's books deal with the most diverse themes, there is an internal continuity. Donald, in *Soldiers' Pay*, who was crippled in Europe and lost his mem-

ory, is a reminder of the war, a suprapersonal symbol, the Disfigured Pilot, who evokes either nobility or hard-heartedness among those who see him, though he himself hardly belongs among the living. They had known him here earlier when he was really alive, "before the world went crazy". The mad, defenseless Benjy of *The Sound and the Fury*, who does not differentiate between events in pre-war 1910 and present 1928 and cannot comprehend the changes affecting his family, is a still more conventional, suprapersonal figure. Faulkner therefore could say that the only emotion Benjy inspired in him was "grief and pity for all mankind".¹³ *The Sound and the Fury* occupies a central position in Faulkner's work and he had good reason to insist that the book was not finished. Its characters continued to live in his imagination. Again and again he returned to his student Quentin, the young old-fashioned knight who killed himself. In *Appendix* (1945), he decides to complete the history of the lost Caddy. A solicitous dwarf librarian recognizes her to be the mistress of a Nazi general in a glossy colored photograph from a magazine. For Faulkner this is the greatest degree to which his heroine can be lost in a cold world. Not only did the characters retain their hold on the novelist, he was still tormented by that moral polarity so clearly manifest in the figures of Jason and Dilsey. Such polarity is characteristic of Faulkner's world. It is not difficult to find it in his later works, in Lucas of *Intruder in the Dust* and the indefatigable Snopeses. In this sense many of his books are a continuation of *The Sound and the Fury* and his entire creative evolution may be correlated with this novel.

For the person who feels at home in Yoknapatawpha, there is something familiar in almost every one of Faulkner's books: Frenchman's Bend and the court in Jefferson figure in the most varied stories, and spotted horses gallop through more than one book. But this striking attachment to native places makes it all the more evident when changes occur in Faulkner's world, changes that reflect shifts in the macrocosm—the twentieth century—and

showing the internal evolution of the writer. Throughout the entire trilogy this historical and creative impetus is particularly visible in the treatment of the motives and fate of Mink. In introducing a new version of a familiar event, Faulkner keeps faith with his own deepening understanding of the truth. The fact that there are different versions of events in his so realistic Yoknapatawpha gives the county even greater mass and, together with its other features, a legendary dimension.

3

In the midst of world-wide recognition, Faulkner more than once with great bitterness and bluntness spoke of the writer's position in his native land. He referred to the fact that art, in a capitalist society, is unnecessary, something of secondary importance. "The writer in America isn't part of the culture of this country",¹⁴ observed Faulkner in early 1955 during an interview with H. Breit. Later he continued this train of thought in Japan, noting that the artist "has no part in our ideology and our politics. . ." ¹⁵ and when it comes to vital questions they don't ask his opinion but rely on the advice of the president of General Motors. To compound the offense, after capital has deprived the artist of his national role, there is the division of art into elite and secondary.

Faulkner repeatedly insisted that it is useful to read not only classical models but the most varied sorts of works. Throughout his life he studied mysteries, in an attempt to combine their techniques with the techniques of contemporary psychological analysis. He had fond memories of his Hollywood days when he worked with Humphrey Bogart, an actor who portrayed heroes retaining their humanity and dignity even at the lowest ebb of life. Faulkner's years as a film scenarist, turning out dialogues influenced his prose. But he always sensed the perils of popular "commercial" culture, his "spiritual" (or more accurately non-spiritual) milieu. For the American writer, lacking centuries of intellectual tradition,

to create his own style is not easy, Faulkner said in Japan. And it is all the more difficult for him to develop as a writer making the most of his talent. As an example of a genuine talent, he mentions F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald, writing from Hollywood to his daughter shortly before he died, in a letter of striking spiritual freedom marred by the bitter sensation of waning strength, mused that he might have taken another path, even in light of commercial pressures and temptations. The writer, whose work on *The Last Tycoon* was interrupted with his death, regrets that he did not say, upon finishing *The Great Gatsby*: "I've found my line—from now on this comes first. This is my immediate duty—without this I am nothing."¹⁶

These words illustrate the sort of courage demanded of a writer who for decades has gone his own way. Faulkner, who in the eyes of his neighbors was either a crank or an idler, always found support in world literature, both classical and modern.

American prose existed for him in various hypostases. Dreiser's novels, breathing life for all their technical faults, seemed to him imbued with grandeur. And he called Henry James, so distant from himself, "one of the masters from whom we learnt our craft."¹⁷ Among the American romantics and realists, Faulkner particularly valued those writers whose works were critical and did not imitate the recognized European models. He felt a particular affinity to two books of the nineteenth century: Melville's *Moby Dick* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. The affinity lay in their development of dramatic situations so familiar to the twentieth century, and in the prose itself which combined realism and allegory.

Like his contemporaries Hemingway and Dos Passos, Faulkner was not one to confine himself to national traditions and actively incorporated European experience. He approached "the giants of the past" as a contemporary writer.

The founts of his inspiration, as is well known, were the Old Testament and Shakespeare which he perceived

as closely related. Rereading them continuously, and he had been familiar with these sources from childhood, the poet retained his ties with the distant past, a past just as real for him as his South and his century. His novel about the Civil War is titled *Absalom, Absalom!*—a name taken from King David's bitter lament for his rebellious son. *The Sound and the Fury*, a novel about the break-up of the twentieth century, is titled with an excerpt from Macbeth's speech before his death. Faulkner liked to read the King James edition of the Bible, linguistically from the epoch of Shakespeare; the high rhetoric sounds natural here, and it is natural to call all things, no matter how dirty or vulgar, by their names. The Bible and Shakespeare were models of how a story of generations, rich in peripeteia, could become poetic.

If Faulkner, in his own words, "always admired"¹⁸ Lady Macbeth, speaking as a novelist for whom true character stood out sharply against a background of dullness and inertia, he had another opinion of Don Quixote, created by Shakespeare's contemporary Cervantes, although he also made this character correspond to the twentieth century and to all of his world. Don Quixote, for Faulkner, was: "a man trying to do the best he can in this ramshackle universe he's compelled to live in. He has ideals which are by our—the pharisaical standards—nonsensical. But by my standards they are not nonsensical. His method of trying to put them into practice is tragic and comic. I can see myself in Don Quixote by reading a page or two now and then, and I would like to think that my behavior is better for having read *Don Quixote*".¹⁹

Faulkner is not only fascinated by different characters, he feels close to different literary movements. One of his favorite heroines was Sarah Gamp, the well known nurse from *Martin Chuzzlewit*, of whom he noted: "...most of her character was bad, but at least it was character".²⁰ He was close both to the realism of Dickens and to English romantic poetry of the nineteenth century, quoting most often from Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" where

the identification of truth with beauty is defended. Faulkner saw old romanticism as the antithesis of naturalism which lacked poetry and of details which did not form a general picture. In the works of Joseph Conrad, that extraordinary English prosaist and one of the first contemporary authors to take a modern approach to the problem of human psychology, Faulkner found a burning actuality transubstantiated into romantic symbols; this was true of the dark image of colonization and the transition from the primordial to the civilized in *Heart of Darkness*, one of his favorite stories.

He was also close but in a different way to the French novelists, Balzac and Flaubert. For him these were two dissimilar artistic models. His words on Balzac are familiar to us: "Balzac—he created an intact world of his own, a bloodstream running through twenty books."²¹ The creator of Yoknapatawpha County repeatedly marvelled at the flow and unity of the *Human Comedy*, and continued to return to its characters. But he noted that he liked the characters themselves, rather than the manner in which they were at times described. Flaubert was for Faulkner an irreproachable artist and one of the greatest craftsmen. He said that he wanted his work to give him the same feeling as a reading of the Old Testament or *The Temptation of St. Anthony*.

Faulkner was well acquainted with the nineteenth century European novel which gives his answer to the question put him by a student of the University of Mississippi in 1947 added weight. "Which novels", asked the student ingenuously, "were greatest or best of the nineteenth century?" Faulkner's answer was hardly surprising for those familiar with his work: "Probably Russian—I remember more Russian names than any others."²² It goes without saying that Faulkner refers first and foremost to Dostoyevsky, of whom he said toward the end of his life: "He is one who has not only influenced me a lot, but . . . I have got a great deal of pleasure out of reading, and I still read him again every year or so. As a craftsman, as well as his insight into people, his capacity for com-

passion, he was of the ones that any writer wants to match if he can. . . ."²³ The tormented and so contemporary world of the novelist seemed to Faulkner to be close to that of the Old Testament, in its wealth of human material and diversity. Behind the provincial town of Skotoprigonevsk in *The Brothers Karamazov*, he saw human nature as it is today. It is not surprising that Faulkner perceived this novel as closely bound to his own creative development and formal experiments. In one interview of 1931, Faulkner observed that Dostoyevsky could have done without his extended exposition had he allowed each hero to tell his own story (Faulkner himself had already done this with each of the Compson brothers in *The Sound and the Fury*). In Faulkner's eyes Dostoyevsky was the representative of the Russian tradition. He also named Gogol and Tolstoy. In *Dead Souls* he saw a grotesque epos, a prayer for a dying world (and this is how Gogol's masterpiece is generally interpreted in the West). Reading Tolstoy's novels in later years and holding them up as examples of great artistry, immune to the ravages of time, he attributed their durability to the artist's independence of all that was conventional and dead in a civilized age. Tolstoy's epic sense of time is far more sweeping than the age he describes. More than once Faulkner has mentioned Chekhov, in his last years, as an example of what was possible in the genre of the short story; but only a writer who concerned himself with the problems that Faulkner thought were essential could symbolize the form so close to his heart.

Twentieth century art and the art of the word in general began for Faulkner with poetry. As a young man he read in the original "les poètes maudits", particularly Verlaine and Jules Laforgue; he continued to read them throughout his life. He also owned collections of contemporary French poetry and of James Joyce's poetry, as well as many other of his works. Joyce's *Ulysses*, because of its use of "stream of consciousness" technique, was closely related to contemporary poetry: by the free movement of memory through the epochs of the past which reflect the twentieth century

as in a mirror, and by its unfettered language, encompassing new, often "forbidden" layers of English. Faulkner saw *Ulysses*' importance as a whole. Therefore he could say that one had to approach this complex experimental novel like an illiterate Baptist preacher approaches the Old Testament—with faith. He was speaking of the spiritual content of the book, with its antitheses—vulgar bourgeois civilization and the unclouded pagan myths, the negation of philistinism. Faulkner was drawn to *Ulysses*, and at the same time dissatisfied with it, a theme worthy of study in itself. In his later years he made this characteristic statement: "James Joyce was one of the great men of my time. He was electrocuted by the divine fire. He, Thomas Mann, were the great writers of my time. He was probably—might have been the greatest, but he was electrocuted. He had more talent than he could control."²⁴

For Faulkner both modern and ancient works were "contemporary". His library naturally enough included *The Brave Soldier Schweik*, and it was just as natural, in Japan, for him to refer to the medieval tankas which he had read in Ezra Pound's translation. Without this experience of world culture, Yoknapatawpha County would not have been understandable throughout the world.

4

In his own fashion, Faulkner compared various types of art and various literary genres, from the sonnet to the novel. He found music to be the lightest and purest of all forms of expression, and the word—the clumsiest. Of course he was well aware that the nature of the novel, reflecting life in motion, determined the aesthetic boundaries of the genre. Already in 1922, while acknowledging that Joseph Hergesheimer's *Linda Condon* was perfect in its own way, he refused to call it a novel: "It is more like a lovely Byzantine frieze: a few unforgettable figures in silent arrested motion, forever beyond the reach of time and troubling the heart like music."²⁵ The writer,

however, strove to the music that must sound forth in any novel; although by nature the form is ponderous for it is obliged to encompass all the complexity and dynamics of life, but as Faulkner said in an interview with Jean Stein: "...the thunder and the music of the prose take place in silence".²⁶ He was particularly sensitive to the potential of words to produce effects typical for other types of art. Deliberately stressing the limits of his art, he contemplated ways of expanding its boundaries.

This particularly relates to his favorite contrast between the methods of the lyricist, who has mastered the sonnet and quatrain to perfection, and the clumsy methods of the novelist. He was concerned with the idea of poetic concentration. Without this, for Faulkner, there could exist no novel, not a single period. Often in his later speeches he compared the artist to the master who engraved the words of a prayer on the head of a pin. Here he was referring to music, sculpture, and primarily, to poetry: "To me, poetry is first. . . . That is the nearest approach to condensing all the beauty and passion of the human heart onto the head of the pin."²⁷ This author of a colossal cycle of novels saw himself as "a failed poet" and insisted that the prosaist must always see himself as a poet,²⁸ perceiving human history in all its shifts and dramas as a whole. It was precisely poetic concentration that redeemed the large form from clumsiness. He claimed not to have noticed the length of *Don Quixote*, and found Conrad's *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* "very short".²⁹

Faulkner placed the short story as a form between the sonnet and the novel. Paradoxically, he claimed it was more difficult to write a short story than a novel, for it demanded almost absolute precision, leaving less room for carelessness. He took Chekhov's concise but pithy stories as the norm for all prose. But in his hierarchy of genres, the short story was only an intermediate stage; in the end, the poet must tackle the novel. He himself wrote his best short stories when he was already immersed in the world of his novels, for his artistic universe

stood behind them. This is particularly applicable to *Barn Burning*, with its complex structure and technique, and masterly executed contrasts.

Of course it is not the hierarchy of genres that is important in Faulkner's artistic world. The novel and the short story interact and are indispensable both in reworking similar episodes and in the revelation of distant historical planes.

One can compare the well known story about Indians *A Justice* with *Absalom, Absalom!* In both cases Faulkner deals with Southerners of mixed blood; this is related to the feeling that all is intermingled in the colorful history of the South. But the tale told by centenarian Sam, an Indian and yet not an Indian, a Negro and yet not a Negro, is set back in a benign, patriarchal time. The modern writer with his passion for casting a strange light on events and for harsh detail, is here immersed in the element of folklore. The novel chronicling the rise and fall of Sutpen, father of both white and colored children who has failed to found a dynasty, corresponds to the defeat of the South in the Civil War. Behind the mixed blood here is that ancient curse of racism still tragically present in our own time. This is a novel of various epochs in the history of the South; Quentin is the intermediary between the present and the past. This Faulknerian hero grew up in an atmosphere of tradition. At the close of *A Justice* which shows him as a child at his grandfather's farm listening to old Sam, we find these words: "Then I knew that I would know." In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin the student probes into the history of Sutpen striving to understand both the history of the South and the essence of Time. He has two faces. His "I" is a part of the patriarchal "We". Besides tradition, he sees something diabolical in the ugly fact of slavery. As a man of the twentieth century, he strives to analyze and disentangle the knots left by the past. Even the image of Time in the novel has many levels. "Time that stands still" means here that in the measured, dead progress of events, individual significant

moments acquire a special reality; but historical time remains the main reality and it requites those who have not recognized the downfall of the South and try to stop the clock of history.

Faulkner often claimed that some of his novels had begun as a story, or a series of stories. At the same time he saw the novel as distinct from the short story, due to its artistic structure. At the University of Mississippi, in 1947, he was asked whether the "Great American Novel" had already been written. Faulkner replied: "People will read *Huck Finn* for a long time. Twain has never really written a novel, however. His work is too loose. We'll assume that a novel has set rules. His work is a mass of stuff—just a series of events."³⁰ Naturally this came as a surprise to those who expected Faulkner to praise Twain's formal freedom.

The question followed: "I understand you use a minimum of restrictions?" And Faulkner's answer was: "I let the novel write itself—no length or style compunctions." It is clear that the internal unity achieved by Faulkner in the novel did not rule out Twain's freedom from canons and precedents.

The creative history of *The Sound and the Fury*, a novel to which Faulkner repeatedly returned, helps us to comprehend how he achieved the transition from the short story to the novel. He conveyed his initial idea in various ways, each version understandably showing only one of its facets. Together they show how the framework of the short story soon seemed too narrow. Invariably we find images of children who, not understanding, have been sent out to play on the day of their grandmother's funeral. In Japan, Faulkner stated that the retarded boy arose as a symbol of this general lack of comprehension and that (after becoming interested in him) he envisioned a tender, protective sister (Caddy) and a pragmatically cruel brother Jason: "And so the character of his sister began to emerge, then the brother, that Jason (who to me represented complete evil. He's the most vicious character in my opinion I ever thought of), then he ap-

peared. . . .By that time I found out I couldn't possibly tell that in a short story."³¹

Other explanations link the novel's conception with the soiled pants of a girl, peeking through the window from a pear tree on the day of a funeral and telling her brothers what she sees: "By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized, it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and that it would have to be a book." Whether the novel began with Benjy or Caddy, the fact remains that a theme had been conceived which could not be developed within the genre of the short story. With the madman, he introduced the problem of breaking time, of time without continuation, time that does not flow and knows neither yesterday nor tomorrow. Caddy brought in the symbolism of a lost being in a cold world, this is culminated in the lostness of her daughter: "And then I realized the symbolism of the soiled pants, and that image was replaced by the one of the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the rainpipe to escape from the only home she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding."³² Here is a statement of the novel's theme: a tale of two lost women.

In the process of becoming a novel, Faulkner's book, and each of its parts, took many motifs from the European novel; contemporary history was correlated with the experience of the past and thereby took on universality. The novel of the Southern writer returned in its own way to classical novelistic situations and themes, among them the bitter meeting of the sinful mother (Caddy) with her daughter who had been raised by the respectable, thrifty brother Jason, an encounter reminiscent of Anna Karenina's meeting with her son. The density of the realistic novel is combined with the quest and insights of the romantic novel, with the interweaving of times and sensation of a genuinely free life reflected in the deathbed delirium of Emily Brontë's Catherine (*Wuthering Heights*), with the liberty and drama of her childhood which remains with her to the end.

After *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner continues his development in the novella "As I Lay Dying". This story of poor farmers has an unusual form. The point is that like all of Faulkner's experiments it is rich in content. Often consistent features of his work can be seen most clearly in such experiments.

Addie Bundren's death is described in short monologues by her relatives, neighbors and acquaintances. The unusual form immediately conveys the impression of a broken life whose essence had been laid bare. Poetry and sober reason at times contradict each other and at times merge. Here begins Darl's narrative—the tale of a madman and poet, to be resumed frequently throughout the story. His clear transparent phrases describe the last days of his mother and the whole difficult path to the town cemetery. After Darl's first limpid monologue comes the confused, endless tale of the neighbor Cora about cakes. The indistinct, confused syntax conveys the utter inanity of her philistine thoughts. Poetry and sobriety also clash in the reactions to Addie's death. The neighbor ladies, among them the zealously pious Cora, sing hymns by the coffin. Outside, farmers discuss their affairs, but the lost Darl is not up to speaking. For this "clairvoyant" and his younger brother Vardaman, whose understanding cannot cope with the lives of grownups, all has been collapsed. At the same time, all of the story's heroes have a rural sobriety, and yet the tale of the family odyssey with Addie's coffin abounds with so many grotesque upheavals, and every member of the family is so strange that Faulkner, in his own words, introduces the character of Doctor Peabody as an uninvolved witness; someone capable of normal thought had to verify the existence of the characters.

That which is familiar from childhood becomes illusory because the twentieth century casts a strange light on tradition. As the neighbors see it this is simply a strange family, but behind it are centuries of work on the land.

Behind one catastrophe is the disintegration which contemporary capitalism brings to any remote area. Tradition itself seems colorful and poetic when the ancient and timeless is uncovered in the present, and yet phantasmagoric and sterile in the context of the present. And this is conveyed by the grotesque characters and situations in the novella.

The milieu of this novella is utterly different from the rural environment of its predecessor, *The Sound and the Fury*. But it is presented in the same lyrical fragments. The insane clarity of Darl's monologues (similar to Benjy's stream of consciousness as introduced into the history of the Compsons) makes a limited local theme seem universal and strangely prominent. Addie's monologue re-examines tradition and life as did Quentin's stream of consciousness. Her father's pessimistic conclusion that life is a preparation for death haunts her, just as Quentin's father's sarcastic aphorisms about the battle of life being lost haunted Quentin. To the teacher, later a farmer's wife, the established order of things seems senseless; it comes to be symbolized in the pharisaically-callous, empty "words" of Cora. The farmer's tradition often proves eroded. This is also true on a slightly higher level, of the traditions of the spiritual pastor of the region, the father of Addie's illegitimate son. His words and deeds are also touched by phariseeism. Addie herself, the eccentric teacher and farmer's wife, incarnates tradition. To her illegitimate son Jewel, as she lies on her deathbed, her blackened hands seem to rest on the blanket like "two of them roots dug up. . .". Tradition uprooted! If the vanity of life ceased to bother the mother to a great extent after the birth of her eldest son Cash, it is nevertheless true that she has left more traces of her life than merely her children. She herself remains, as the novella tells us, her impulses, her rebellion: for her own vivid monologue can be heard in the family's procession with the coffin through her native haunts. It is interesting how this image of mother differs from the mother in *Winesburg, Ohio*, which paved the way for Faulkner's story through its structure and complex jux-

tapositions of life and discontent, disintegration and new beginnings, poetry and idle talk. Anderson's mother has been transformed by the bourgeois town into a spectre, but before her death, in a sad, poetical encounter with an eccentric doctor and in her prayers for her son, she seems to return into the world of her youth. In Faulkner's story, the mother lives despite physical death and the phantasmagoric funeral procession; her rebellious monologue reminds us how tradition, without losing its meaning, and the maximum demands made of life in our time have drifted apart.

"As I Lay Dying" is an unusual title. It is sometimes translated in the past and sometimes in present tense. The latter, while grammatically imprecise, is closer to Faulkner's perception of time. In the very structure of the story, in Addie's voice from the grave, there is an inherent rejection of death. In her voice one can hear a lyrical "I" and a "thou" directed to the reader. The present, of which every Faulknerian novel speaks, is time without limit; it has inherited many problems from the past; it recalls antiquity and insistently seeks solutions for these problems; it hungers for continuation. Addie's story, where questions remain unanswered, and the ill-starred events of her burial are set in precisely such a present.

At the same time, toward the end of the twenties, Faulkner began work on *The Hamlet*. This novel, published in 1940, grew out of earlier written stories. It gives a good indication of Faulkner's development. Here the rural tradition is illuminated differently. Both the writer's ideal and his penchant for epos are connected to the old tradition of the freeman. The Snopes trilogy, while no less grotesque and tragicomical in its own way than the story of the Bundrens, has a more solid epic foundation. But this strikingly vigorous novella retains its freshness for the post-war audience. It is hardly surprising that in some traditionally agricultural countries, people first become acquainted with Faulkner as a twentieth century master through his novella "As I Lay Dying". The Spanish edition of Faulkner's collected works begins with this novella, and it remains the

only one of his "farmer" stories to be translated in Finland.

To a great extent, "As I Lay Dying" is representative of Faulkner's whole enormous epic of Yoknapatawpha. Behind the juxtaposition of many personalities and points of view, the coupling of various time periods and shifts in illumination, we find a basic set of problems which the writer wrestled over for decades, as he changed in time and with time.

When asked about the influence of other sources on his works, Faulkner replied that he was influenced by anything he read. For him, all preceding culture was both a prerequisite and a means of measuring genuine originality in our time. As for his conception of the goal of a writer, demanding "a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit", he says in that same Nobel Prize speech: "to create out of materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before".

NOTES

¹ *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. XVII, No. 2.

² Maxwell Geismar, *American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity*, N.Y., Hill and Wang, 1958.

³ *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*, ed. by James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, N.Y., Random House, 1968, p. 57.

⁴ *Faulkner at West Point*, N.Y., Random House, 1964, p. 85.

⁵ *William Faulkner: Early Prose and Poetry*, ed. by Carvel Collins, p. 86.

⁶ *Princeton Univ. Library Chronicle*, 1967, Vol. XVIII, No. 3.

⁷ *Lion in the Garden*, p. 101.

⁸ *Faulkner in the University*, Vintage Books, N. Y., 1965, p. 232.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

¹⁰ *Lion in the Garden*, p. 255.

¹¹ *Faulkner at West Point*, p. 92.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹³ *Lion in the Garden*, p. 245.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁶ *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. by Andrew Turnfull, 1963, N.Y., Scribners, p. 79.

- ¹⁷ *Faulkner in the University*, p. 243.
¹⁸ *Lion in the Garden*, p. 251.
¹⁹ *Faulkner at West Point*, p. 94.
²⁰ *Lion in the Garden*, p. 251.
²¹ *Ibid.*
²² *Ibid.*, p. 58.
²³ *Faulkner in the University*, p. 69.
²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 280.
²⁵ *William Faulkner: Early Prose and Poetry*, p. 101.
²⁶ *Lion in the Garden*, p. 248.
²⁷ *Faulkner at West Point*, p. 118.
²⁸ *Faulkner in the University*, p. 145.
²⁹ *Ibid.*
³⁰ *Lion in the Garden*, p. 56.
³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.
³² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Y. ZASURSKY

DOS PASSOS' EXPERIMENTAL NOVEL*

"Dos Passos's novels of recent years have been disappointing,"¹ writes the literary critic Michael Millgate. "An Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Reactionary Thought" is the title of the section of a recent Soviet book on American literature which deals with Dos Passos' novel *Midcentury* (1961). Soviet critics are unanimous in their evaluation of Dos Passos' last works as artistically insignificant and highly reactionary sermons against communism.

Nevertheless we still study Dos Passos' novels of the twenties and thirties, not only because at the time he was close to the workers' movement, but because his works of this period are important and reflect progressive, contemporary thought. In the thirties, the writer attempted to express his disapproval of bourgeois America and to paint an epic picture of American society. For this purpose he ventured a bold experiment which dates back to the beginning of his career in the twenties.

Dos Passos' literary career in many ways parallels the evolution of members of the so-called "lost generation". On the eve of the First World War he was enrolled at Harvard. From 1916 to 1917 he studied architecture in Spain. This later influenced his writing.

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The war, in which Dos Passos participated, changed his views on contemporary capitalist society. His rejection of capitalism is expressed in his first book *One Man's Initiation*—1917, which was published in 1920. Here he clearly expresses not only pacifism, but his rejection of the bourgeois world and of an imperialistic war. Published in England, this was the first major work of American prose to deal with the First World War.

Even here Dos Passos is not content to remain a mere pacifist. His hero, Martin Howe, makes the acquaintance of a French officer who extolls socialism: "What we want is . . . socialism of the masses that shall spring from the natural need of men to help one another. . . ."2

Condemning the imperialistic war as absurd, Dos Passos searches for a means of struggling against it. Socialism, though perhaps he has only a rough grasp of what the word implies, seems to be such a means. Reading this book one keenly feels the inhumanity of war. Dos Passos' creative method is evident here, to be developed in later works. He avoids a smooth, sequential development of the plot, favoring a more fragmentary mode of narration which he finds more suitable to his material.

This tale served as a study for his novel *Three Soldiers* (1921), which tells the story of three Americans who fought in the First World War. Here his rejection of the traditional novel form is all the more evident. The tale of the three soldiers is conveyed through almost unconnected episodes. Each man's fate is relatively independent of his fellows'. The plot is not unified. There are three story lines, at the same time titles of the sections unite the plot and cast some light on the general theme of the book.

Part One, "Making the Mould", deals with the men's training and departure for Europe. Part Two, "The Metal Cools", recounts their ocean voyage to France and their first disillusionment with the war. Part Three, "Machines", shows how the heroes are finally transformed into cogs of the military machine. Part Four, "Rust", takes place at the end of the war, when the flaws in the mili-

tary machinery and in the previous tenor of their life become particularly evident. In the fifth part, "The World Outside", one of the three—John Andrews—comes into contact with post-war Parisian life, something quite new for him. "Under the Wheels", the sixth part, shows the final results of the men's experiences. Andrews ends up in a disciplinary battalion. He deserts and is arrested, a victim of tradition which he despises.

Thus each part has a title which enables the author to show the development of his conception, to unite various components of the plot, and to express the fundamental anti-militaristic theme of the novel. The titles project a general image of a machine which, even when it has become obsolete, continues to crush Andrews and his friends under its wheels.

Dos Passos' novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) also attacks the bourgeois order. At the same time, the writer extends his creative experiments here. The novel seems composed of several independent works. Episodes and fragments are arbitrarily combined, united only by the fact that they occur in New York, from 1890 to 1925. Dos Passos felt that such an approach would enable him to show reality with greater objectivity and from a more complete perspective. He was attempting to convey not the stream of consciousness of his characters, but the stream of life in the Big City, the personification of the bourgeois world.

Here reporters, actors, lawyers, a milkman, as well as the unemployed, immigrants, and criminals participate. Each represents particular social group. The text is interspersed with excerpts from newspapers, sketches of New York life which are totally disparate and have no relation to the heroes. Internal monologues alternate with descriptions of characters' lives. In the beginning it is difficult for the reader even to distinguish the heroes of the novel.

Now each part has not only a title, but epigraphs designed to convey the movement of city life. But these are too fragmented to be fully successful.

The episodes making up the novel's text are varied, but they can be grouped into basic types: 1) *episodes* from the lives of heroes who are present throughout the novel; 2) *sketches* of minor characters who appear once; 3) *scenes* of city life, the park, the ferry, cafés; 4) *fragments* from newspapers. Dos Passos wanted to write a novel without heroes. His goal was to recreate the flavor of his epoch.

Manhattan Transfer marked an intensification in Dos Passos' criticism of the bourgeois world. We see it as a significant experiment whose novelty, unfortunately, overshadowed its content. The fragmentary composition made the novel difficult to approach. The reader is artificially forced to remain at the level of the conception. The author hoped the kaleidoscopic images will evoke a picture of life in a big, capitalistic city. But the chaotic structure of the novel is hardly the best means of presenting the chaos of bourgeois society. In all the confusion, the author's condemnation of capitalism is lost. We are left with the impression that Dos Passos was unable to organize his ideas in a consistent and logical manner.

Many critics called *Manhattan* impressionistic. Malcolm Cowley was correct when he observed that "the social ideas of the novelist are, in *Manhattan Transfer*, at war with his personal emotions".³ He notes that while Dos Passos' ideas are revolutionary, his emotions are those of an aesthete. This contradiction is manifest in the fragmentary structure of the novel.

There was great controversy over *Manhattan Transfer* in the United States. Upton Sinclair told Dos Passos that he had spoiled the book by using a kaleidoscopic form, and that he could have produced a great work had he only been able to state his ideas simply and directly. Here Sinclair lost sight of the fact that whatever errors Dos Passos had made were inherent in his creative method and in his view of the world.

The American critic Joseph Warren Beach commented on the failure of Dos Passos' experiment: "The fragmen-

tary moments are shown with startling vividness in circumstance, and with a certain intimacy in the rendering of sensations and moods. We never question the reality of the character or the situation. But so rapid is the shift from situation to situation, from character to character, so wide are the intervals between appearances, that we cannot quite grasp the thread which binds together the psychic life of the individual. They are individuals, for they have particular bodies and vocations and social status, and they have names and addresses in the telephone book. But they are not quite *persons*; for we are not made to feel that they are self-directing spirits. We are not shown the ideal nucleus round which their emotional life is organized. And so in spite of their vivid reality, they do not have the sentimental *importance* of characters in fiction.”⁴

Like other American critics, Beach calls *Manhattan Transfer* a “collectivist” novel. He finds that Dos Passos is not interested in individual lives, personal grief or joy. He concerns himself with individuals only in so far as they are characteristic of a given social structure. “. . . It is the social nexus which the collectivist is seeking,” writes Beach. “But the paradox of Dos Passos’s world is that the social nexus is just what is lacking.”⁵

We agree that it is precisely the fragmentary nature of the work that prevents Dos Passos from showing the social nexus of bourgeois society and interferes with the broad picture of life he had hoped to create. His attempt to replace conclusion with evidence and argument proves his downfall. For simply presenting evidence is not enough. He attempts to replace generalization by showing the foundation upon which such a generalization would have been based. This is not at all the same. One feels a need for some sort of summing-up.

Dos Passos’ experiment is reminiscent of Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. Both authors try to conceal their attitudes to the events which are depicted. Dos Passos also uses internal monologue and refrains from commenting on the action. He uses stream of consciousness

in an urbanistic, impressionistic, sociological experiment. His point of departure, however, a refusal to generalize, dooms him to failure. He is unable to show how that social life develops. As opposed to Faulkner, Dos Passos shows the world to be chaotic rather than absurd. He is not attempting to convey the characters' internal world as an entity separated from both the external world and the author's perceptions. Rather he is presenting the external world freed of authorial perception and evaluation. His experiment has greater social significance. Sinclair Lewis, who generally opposed modernistic tendencies, considered *Manhattan Transfer* more significant than any work of Gertrude Stein or Marcel Proust or even Joyce's *Ulysses* because Dos Passos was able to use their experimental psychology and style, their rebellion against the clichés of classical literature but his work was "interesting". Dos Passos' novel is indeed interesting because the writer attempted to show the pulse of life in contemporary America in all its many colors.

Later, Dos Passos abandoned the extraordinary kaleidoscopic approach which is characteristic of *Manhattan Transfer*.

At the close of the twenties he grew closer to progressive movements. He actively defended Sacco and Vanzetti, and was arrested for participating in a demonstration. It was at this time that he declared his interest in the activities of progressive workers' organizations. Analyzing his own evolution, in 1928, he wrote in the essay "My Life" that in so far as his own evolution is concerned he feels that the war made him a radical. This happened to many other writers as well. He had no particular convictions before that time, but the more he learned of industrial conditions under the capitalist system, the "redder" he became. He did not join a revolutionary party and made little effort to propagandize his ideas. This was due more to his upbringing than to his theories. He was accustomed to solitude from childhood. He believed that if an American writer tries to depict aspects of life that he knows as truthfully and scientifically as possible, then

his work needs no specific ideological coloring; even without this his writing will pass sentence on contemporary American life. Dos Passos affirmed that in an epoch of crisis he would work with the Communists, for he was totally sympathetic to their goals. But at the time he wrote the essay "My Life" (1928), he strove to be as nonpartisan as possible. He was uncertain whether he could succeed.

One can see that Dos Passos' contact with progressive social forces exerted a certain influence on his work. At the same time he did not clearly state his political sympathies in his writings. He has his own ideas on proletarian literature.

For Dos Passos, a powerful story, powerful language and materialistically precise ideas come to a writer only as a result of immersion in the working masses. He believed that all really good writers were proletarian writers.

It is evident that such views are a result of the author's desire to depict the basic trends of contemporary American life as fully as possible, and to do this without letting the authorial presence intrude in the fabric of the work. The author, for Dos Passos, should only be discernible through the novel's structure.

In keeping with Dos Passos' desire to comment on the most pressing problems of his day and give a broad picture of America, he released the novel *The 42nd Parallel* in 1930. This was the first novel in the trilogy *U.S.A.*, followed by *1919* (in 1932) and *The Big Money* (in 1936). The latter was chosen best novel of 1937 by the American Writers Congress.

The trilogy opens with a picture of America at the turn of the century and closes with a crisis. Dos Passos sought to paint an epic canvas of thirty years of American life. Feeling the necessity for consummate artistic structure and an emphasis on certain generalization Dos Passos carefully worked out a special form for his novels. Each had four basic components: portraits of literary characters, biographical portraits of historical personages, Newsreel, and

those curious authorial monologues which he called "the Camera Eye". The structure is logical rather than kaleidoscopic, although Dos Passos utilizes many experiments in *Manhattan Transfer*. These four elements alternate in a consistent order. Usually the portraits of literary characters are separated by "Newsreel", "the Camera Eye", or portraits of historical personages.

Each element plays a particular part in the development of the epic. Each has a vital artistic or thematic function. The historical portraits according to the author provide historical background of the first three decades of the twentieth century in America. Newsreel, interspersed between biographical fragments, documents various moments in American life and helps to restore the climate of the epoch more concretely. "The Camera Eye" portrays the author's attitude to life. It is an authorial stream of consciousness, autobiographical internal monologues reflecting the author's response to life that lends the epic a lyric touch.

Just as in *Manhattan Transfer*, the characters represent various levels of American society. Their lives are presented in fragments which, when united, form whole biographies. Many of these lives do not intersect.

The trilogy *U.S.A.* offers perspective and at times witty criticism of American life. The hero of the trilogy, John Ward Moorehouse, is particularly well executed. The son of a railroad worker, he first works as a book distributor, then studies at the University of Philadelphia, eventually joining a real estate firm. Gradually advancing, he marries a wealthy woman, divorces her, marries another wealthy woman, and eventually ends up as a public relations man, fighting against the rise of progressive trade unions. During the war he holds an important post in the Red Cross. Moorehouse becomes a symbol of the businessman in much the same way as Dreiser's financier Cowperwood.

The eleven remaining major characters similarly represent various social levels.

Mac, the son of a working man, supports the Industrial Workers of the World. He goes to Mexico, loses contact

with the I.W.W. and becomes, in the end, the proprietor of a bookstore which sells, among other books, the works of progressive writers.

Janey Williams, daughter of a retired captain, a stenographer, works as Moorehouse's secretary, first in New York, then in Paris.

Eleanor Stoddard, daughter of a stockyard worker from Chicago, becomes an interior decorator, and then works with Moorehouse in the Red Cross in Paris.

Charley Anderson starts life as an automechanic, serves in the army as a pilot, and fights in France. Returning to America, he makes his living in the aviation industry, marries an actress, and dies in an automobile accident.

Richard Ellsworth Savage, a lawyer who abandons his leftist views to serve Moorehouse, becomes a staunch advocate of "Americanism". He personifies a certain type of servile intellectual.

Eveline Hutchins, daughter of a Protestant minister, like Eleanor Stoddard becomes a decorator. She works in the Red Cross in Paris and eventually commits suicide from an overdose of sleeping pills.

Joe Williams, Janey's brother, is a sailor in the navy. He deserts.

Daughter, a girl from Texas whom Savage meets in Rome, dies in a plane crash.

Margo Dowling, from a family of actors, becomes a Hollywood star.

Ben Compton is a socialist who, despite persecution refuses to abandon his ideals.

Finally, there is Mary French, a member of a workers' movement, who is thrown into prison for speaking out against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.

In *The 42nd Parallel* there are five major characters: Mac, Janey, Moorehouse, Eleanor Stoddard, and Charley Anderson. In the novel *1919* Dos Passos also introduces five major characters: Joe Williams, Richard Ellsworth Savage, Eveline Hutchins, Daughter, and Ben Compton. In the final volume of the trilogy, *The Big Money*, Charley Anderson and Richard Ellsworth Savage appear

again; and there are new protagonists—Mary French and Margo Dowling. Each character's biography follows a strict scheme, a sort of sociological questionnaire listing date and place of birth, occupation of parents, education, interests, marital status.

The lives of these twelve characters form the basis of the trilogy. They represent various social groups: the working class, the intelligentsia, the business world. And together, for Dos Passos, they form an epic canvas of American society during a period of thirty years.

Major landmarks in the social history of the period are conveyed with the help of portraits of historical personages. Twenty-five such portraits are drawn from the world of business, science, politics, art, and the press.

The first portrait, entitled "Lover of Mankind", is a striking and loving depiction of Eugene Debs, the hero of the American workers' movement who fought so tirelessly for the workingman's rights.

In *The 42nd Parallel* we also meet "The Plant Wizard", Luther Burbank, and "Big Bill" Heywood, also a prominent organizer of American workers' movements and one of the founders of the American Communist Party. There follows a profile of William Jennings Bryan, "The Boy Orator of the Platte", an experienced demagogue who unsuccessfully ran as the Democratic candidate for president in 1896. Other portraits include Minor C. Keith, "Emperor of the Carribean", the founder of the United Fruit Company who, practically speaking, "ruled" several Latin American republics, and Andrew Carnegie, "Prince of Peace", whom Dos Passos characterized in the following manner:

*Andrew Carnegie believed in oil
Andrew Carnegie believed in steel
always saved his money
whenever he had a million dollars he invested it...⁶*

Edison is called "The Electrical Wizard"; the tale "Proteus" introduces the well-known American mathematician

and electrician Steinmetz (who was warmly praised by Lenin); senator Lafolette is nicknamed "Fighting Bob".

The opening portrait in 1919 is a poetic sketch of John Reed, "Playboy". Others include Randolph Bourne, the outstanding critic and publicist, Theodore Roosevelt—"The Happy Warrior", the journalist Hibben—"A Hoosier Quixote", and Thomas Woodrow Wilson—"Meester Veelson". One of the best portraits shows J. P. Morgan. Titled "The House of Morgan", it concludes with the following lines:

*"Wars and panics on the stock exchange,
machinegunfire and arson,
bankruptcies, warloans,
starvation, lice, cholera and typhus:
good growing weather for the House of Morgan."*⁷

"Joe Hill" recalls the remarkable American worker-poet. "Paul Bunyan—lumberjack" recounts the lynching of Wesley Everest, member of the I.W.W. and lumberjack. This completes the historical characters in 1919.

The Big Money contains portraits of Frederick Winslow Taylor, founder of the speed-up system, Henry Ford—"Tin Lizzie", Thorstein Veblen—"The Bitter Drink", Isadora Duncan—"Art and Isadora", Rudolph Valentino—"Adagio Dancer", the Wright brothers—"The Campers at Kitty Hawk", Frank Lloyd Wright—"Architect", William Randolph Hearst—"Poor Little Rich Boy", and Samuel Insull, owner of many American electric companies,—"Power Superpower".

The mere enumeration of these names gives us a broad perspective of American life. To avoid the impression of an encyclopedic dictionary of historical personages, Dos Passos composes each portrait in poetic prose. Let us take, by way of example, the final lines of his portrait of John Reed, "Playboy":

*A man has to do many things in his life.
Reed was a westerner words meant what they said.
He threw everything he had and himself into Smolny,
dictatorship of the proletariat;*

U.S.S.R.

*The first workers' republic
was established and stands.*

*Reed wrote, undertook missions (there were spies
everywhere), worked till he dropped,
caught typhus and died in Moscow.⁸*

While this excerpt is neither rhythmic nor rhymed, it is essentially poetic in the richness of the images it evokes. Violations of syntax lend this "lay" of John Reed even greater expressiveness and an underlying current of emotionality.

Two "essays" in the trilogy are somewhat exceptional. "The Body of an American" (1919), a poetic requiem which concludes the novel, is dedicated to soldiers who died on the battlefields of the First World War. The hero of the essay is the Unknown Soldier whose ashes were sent by the French back to the United States and then interred at Arlington National Cemetery. "Vag", which concludes *The Big Money* and thereby the trilogy as a whole, is the lyrical tale of a young American, unemployed and hungry. These images are extremely important, both ideologically and emotionally. They show the inhumanity of a war in which unknown soldiers perished, and of a social system, which deprives young men of the joy of living.

The sixty-eight "Newsreels" play a significant role in the trilogy *U.S.A.* Each such segment contains various elements that convey the "flavor" of the epoch: snatches of popular songs, headlines, excerpts from newspaper articles.

"Newsreel I", which opens *The 42nd Parallel*, begins with lines from "For There's Many a Man Been Murdered in Luzon", a song which became popular during the Spanish-American War of 1898-1899:

*It was that emancipated race
That was charging up the hill
Up to where them insurrectos
Was afigting fit to kill.*

*And the Captain bold of Company B
Was a-fighting in the lead
Just like a trueborn soldier he
Of them bullets took no heed.*⁹

For the American reader this song instantly recalled the atmosphere of war at the turn of the century.

Then follow headlines, proclaiming the events of the time: "Capital City's Century Closed", "Claims Islands for All Time", "Churches Greet New Century". Among the excerpts from society chronicles and news articles, these words from a speech made by Senator Albert J. Beveridge stand out: "The twentieth century will be American. American thought will dominate it. American progress will give it color and direction. American deeds will make it illustrious."¹⁰ These words serve as a prologue to the trilogy. But the senator's forecast will be disproved rather than confirmed in the novel.

The final "Newsreel" LXVIII (in the novel *The Big Money*) begins with the headline: "Wall Street Stunned". Then follow headlines of crises, workers' movements, unemployment, falling stocks, and loss of faith in bourgeois values, and lines from popular songs.

The "Newsreels" appear unstructured. Often headlines and citations from newspapers break off in mid-word, or begin in mid-phrase. They form a literary montage compiled from the flow of thoughts of a newspaper reader whose eyes jump from one headline to the next and who may, at the same time, be listening to a popular song or even humming a melody. The author also wishes to create the impression that he is not involved in the selection of this historical realia. But in fact, as the Soviet critic I. A. Kashkin observed, "this is only another sort of internal authorial commentary" which helps the reader into the flow of historical events subsequently taken up in the novel. Such commentary is intentionally complicated. The "Newsreels" give us the feeling of the movement of time, stressing the epic quality of the trilogy. Setting the chronological boundaries of the novel, they mark temporal

milestones in the path of American society as these are reflected in the newspapers, songs of the times, etc.

The most complex element of the trilogy is "the Camera Eye", where the author channels his thoughts into a lyrical, personal commentary on the epoch. The path of history here is charted by the coordinations of the author's life. Here Dos Passos addresses the readers of his generation. In "the Camera Eye" of *The 42nd Parallel*, Dos Passos writes: "...You liked books and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Captain Marryat's novels and wanted to go away to sea and to foreign cities. . . ."¹¹ This autobiographical note is not primarily intended to inform the reader that as a child Dos Passos loved to read, nor to describe his daydreams. These are the reading matter and dreams of many Americans who grew up in those years with Dos Passos.

"The Camera Eye" number 27, in 1919, is an internal monologue describing the author's impressions of the American expeditionary forces crossing the ocean at the time of the First World War. It has much in common with the mood of the hero in Dos Passos' tale *The Initiation of a Man—1917*; indeed the first part is almost a complete reproduction of the description of Martin Howe's ship landing in France.

In *The Big Money*, "the Camera Eye" (number 50) depicts the author's thoughts as he takes part in a demonstration which is broken up by police armed with truncheons. This was a protest against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti:

*. . .they have built the electric chair and hired the
executioner to throw the switch
all right we are two nations
America our nation has been beaten by strangers who
have bought the laws. . . .*¹²

This expresses one of the major themes of the novel: America is not one, but two nations. "Our nation", the nation of the American people, has been beaten by strangers, the wealthy men who executed Sacco and Vanzetti and are

eliminating progressive movements. Thus "the Camera Eye" is more than the author's lyrical diary inserted into the text. As the author, together with the heroes of the trilogy, matures, his commentary becomes more conscious and more mature; his voice rings clearer and blends more organically with the other elements of the trilogy. The authorial judgements from the confused childish perceptions of the young Dos Passos at the turn of the century grow into a penetrating publicistic exposure of the flaws of contemporary American society as seen by a prominent experienced American writer.

Fifty-one such "Camera Eyes" chronicle the author's internal development throughout thirty years of his life and make of Dos Passos the thirteenth major character.

Dos Passos' trilogy *U.S.A.* stands out from American novels of the time for its sweeping, epic treatment of historical material. Dos Passos manages to take a new view of America and show the disillusionment with the idea of "an American century", the loss of faith in bourgeois America. Dos Passos' vision, however, lacks a real positive perspective. His heroes are denied the possibility of spiritual integrity and are not able to become fighters for new ideals and values. Even those heroes for whom he has great sympathy do not succeed. And the novel ends with the colossal failure of America herself, the crisis of 1929. There is no one among his major characters who could suggest a way to overcome this failure, not because Dos Passos does not see such men, for he names in the course of his trilogy men of the caliber of John Reed and Bill Heywood. Rather the author believes that it is impossible to change social conditions which might lead to a change in a man's fate. Here human nature and society, just as in *Three Soldiers* and *Manhattan Transfer*, are unchanging and unchangeable for Dos Passos. In this sense his trilogy *U.S.A.* is inferior to the novels of Hemingway in the late thirties, and to Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Commenting on the trilogy as a whole, Malcolm Cowley, close to American progressive circles during the thirties, wrote in 1937 that these novels "...give us an ex-

traordinarily diversified picture of contemporary life, but they fail to include at least one side of it—the will to struggle ahead, the comradeship in struggle, the consciousness of new men and new forces continually rising. Although we may seem to Dos Passos a beaten nation, the fight is not over”.¹³

Cowley is challenging the internal monologue of “the Camera Eye”, number 50, where America is portrayed as a beaten nation, and urging the author not to overlook perspectives for improvement. He condemns Dos Passos’ refusal to continue the struggle, for this is how in 1937 he interpreted the final volume of the trilogy, *The Big Money*. Certainly Dos Passos provided a foundation for such an interpretation, both in the contents of his novel and in his break with revolutionary and progressive circles which led to his attacks on communists in the thirties, and ultimately in the nineteen sixties Dos Passos—the thirteenth hero of the trilogy *U.S.A.*, formerly a rebel—became a friend of Tshombe and sided with the reactionaries.

Dos Passos’ eventual evolution and his shift into the reactionary camp does not permit us to dismiss those works which he wrote during his years of solidarity with the workers’ movement. We are obliged, on the contrary, to approach his trilogy more comprehensively and with greater attention. This obligation is all the more pressing if we consider that many American and European critics highly value Dos Passos’ works, particularly his writings of the twenties and thirties. In 1955, for example, Sartre called him the greatest writer of our time.

In praising Dos Passos’ early work, Joseph Warren Beach considers that the writer inaugurated a new epoch in American literature. *Three Soldiers*, writes Beach in *American Fiction. 1920-1940* (p. 34), “. . . may be counted the beginning of strictly contemporary fiction in the United States”. Here the venerable literary historian surely exaggerates. While Dos Passos may have had the potential to be one of the forefathers of contemporary literature, this potential was never realized. His vision

was neither deep enough nor sufficiently broad for his novels to be evaluated as more than historically important literary experiments. They cannot be regarded as completed, contemporary works of art. Moreover Beach exaggerates the part played by modernism in the development of contemporary American literature. For here "contemporaneity" is defined by the novelty of a writer's views on life rather than by the novelty of graphic and formal devices. It would be more accurate in this sense to trace the new type of American literature back to Theodore Dreiser, John Reed, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis. Dos Passos himself confessed that he was much influenced by the philosophy of John Reed. This is evident in *Three Soldiers*. Finally, Beach exaggerates the significance of Dos Passos' literary experiment. Dos Passos' rejection of the traditional plot was foreshadowed by Sherwood Anderson in *Winesburg, Ohio*. There are many American scholars who do not share Beach's views on *Three Soldiers*. Dos Passos himself, in the thirties, did not share them, for he presented Dreiser with a copy of his trilogy, inscribed: "...Dear Dreiser—Just wanted you to know that I still feel that if it hadn't been for your pioneer work none of us would have gotten our stuff written or published!"¹⁴

It is perhaps more complicated to evaluate *Manhattan Transfer* and the trilogy *U.S.A.* Both Soviet and American critics have debated the sense and significance of these experiments. Corneli Zelinsky and Pyotr Pavlenko wrote an open letter to Dos Passos in March 1932, in which they criticized many aspects of his creative method: "...in your efforts to achieve maximum objectivity, you have slipped into an ideological aloofness from life.... The verbatim excerpts from newspapers and bits of local news in *The 42nd Parallel* inadvertently recall the empirical approach of Joyce who, like a sheriff or a bailiff, attempts to produce an inventory of the world, thereby fulfilling his legal obligations.... A writer's task does not consist of viewing the world from the perspective of an ant, crawling from one grain of sand to the

next, but of striving to comprehend the actual order of the world so that he can change it: Goethe, whose centennial is now being celebrated throughout the civilized world, was well aware that philosophy can govern an artist's perceptions without becoming tendentiousness."

Certain positions taken by the authors of this letter were disputed by the late distinguished scholar A. A. Elistratova, who noted that reproaches of this kind were based on a purely formal analysis of Dos Passos' creative method. One cannot speak of "ideological aloofness from life" when every line of these excerpts from newspapers bears witness to the active intrusion of the author who selects from the archives of history those facts and documents which all more or less represent a tangle of contradictions of any given historical moment. Any chapter from *The 42nd Parallel* or *1919* will confirm this position.

After analyzing "Newsreel XXVIII" to demonstrate her point, Elistratova criticizes Dos Passos from another perspective, pointing out that separate compositional elements in Dos Passos' novels are to a great degree mechanically put together. In places the excerpts from newspapers are interspersed between chapters where the material is not organically connected. "Perhaps it is in this area that one should criticize Dos Passos' creative method."

A. A. Elistratova has noted the weakness in Dos Passos' work, the lack of an organic bond between various components of his novels. In this sense her observation that the devices of "Newsreel" and the historical portraits are not in themselves a departure from realism is also well founded. It is more difficult to extend these judgments to "the Camera Eye", however, which, particularly in *The 42nd Parallel*, is characterized by a certain artificiality and mechanical quality; often it is impossible to fathom the sense of the author's lyrical monologues.

Upton Sinclair criticizes this element of *The 42nd Parallel*, where "the Camera Eye" seems most incongruous. The device is far more organically integrated with the basic narrative, or more accurately with the components of the narrative, in *The Big Money*, where Dos Passos becomes

a full-fledged, active hero; this cannot be said for the first part of the trilogy.

In discussing Dos Passos' experiment we must not ignore his own conception of the writer's role. This clarifies much in his creative methodology that might otherwise be difficult to understand. Stating the basis of his views on art, Dos Passos once called the writer a machine that absorbs life and then gives it verbal expression. The mechanical nature of Dos Passos' experimentation is evident from such a description. The author's efforts to achieve a "scientific" method led him to deviate from a literary course.

Somewhat earlier, in 1928, he wrote: "...any novelist that is worth his salt is a sort of truffle dog digging up raw material which a scientist, an anthropologist or a historian can later use to permanent advantage."¹⁵ Here he speaks of a writer as a chronicler of his era.

Such an attempt to equate the role of a writer to that of a source of raw material for historians diminishes the significance of the artistic image. Once again we can see the weakness of Dos Passos' experiment which leads to a rejection of all generalization, and dwarfs the importance of cognition of reality through images.

Dos Passos attempts to create his own sort of literary constructivism. Here we see the influence of his earlier interest in architecture which he never abandoned. In his 1932 preface to *Three Soldiers*, he called the writer "the architect of history". But a literary work is not an architectural construction. Words and images are not bricks, nor are they concrete structures. They cannot be set up in space, whether by whim or logic, without a careful consideration of the laws of thinking in images. And Dos Passos has failed to take this into consideration. One can find everything that is essential for a novel in any one of his works. The ingredients are there, but something else is lacking. One might compare him to a housewife who has collected salt, sugar, water, flour and yeast on a table but cannot combine them into an adequate dough, let alone a loaf of bread.

Sergei Eisenstein's film *The Battleship Potemkin* made a strong impression on Dos Passos. But the writer was unable to attain the organic unity of form and content, that unified, synthesized perception of the world that distinguishes Eisenstein's films. This was precluded by the fragmentary composition of Dos Passos' novels. In the end his formal experiment proved to be incompatible with the epic principle; the separate components deprive the works of their monumentality, which is the most important characteristic of an epic.

Dos Passos' attempt to work out his own style of epic narration, despite many interesting discoveries, failed not only because the experiment itself was mechanical, but because his vision of life was mechanical.

The subsequent development of Dos Passos, who did not believe in man's ability to eradicate social ills, as we mentioned earlier, led him away from progressive ideals. As the American critic Maxwell Geismar observes in *The Nation* (April 14, 1956), this "led not only to a major revision of his thinking, but, apparently, to a complete cessation of his creative energy and his human emotions. There was a *psychic* wound that has never stopped bleeding".

NOTES

- ¹ Michael Millgate, *American Social Fiction*, Edinburgh and Lnd., 1964, p. 140.
- ² John Dos Passos, *One Man's Initiation*, Lnd., 1920, pp. 117-18.
- ³ Malcolm Cowley, *After the Genteel Tradition*, Carbondale, 1964, p. 137.
- ⁴ Joseph W. Beach, *American Fiction. 1920-1940*, N.Y., 1942, p. 37.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ⁶ John Dos Passos, *The 42nd Parallel*, N.Y. and Lnd., 1930, p. 273.
- ⁷ John Dos Passos, *1919*, N.Y., 1938, p. 340.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁹ John Dos Passos, *The 42nd Parallel*, N.Y. and Lnd., 1930, pp. 1-2.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- ¹² John Dos Passos, *The Big Money*, N.Y., 1938, p. 462.
- ¹³ Malcolm Cowley, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
- ¹⁴ John H. Wrenn, *John Dos Passos*, N.Y., 1961, p. 105.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

E. SOLOVYOV

THE COLOR OF TRAGEDY*

Now that public fascination with Hemingway's life, and correspondingly with certain features of his heroes, has somewhat subsided, it is easier to discern the major theme of Hemingway's work: the problem of a man's personal responsibility and moral steadfastness.

Hemingway can scarcely be regarded as a moralist. He and his heroes feel a deep scorn for moral reflection and edification. As Soviet critic I. Kashkin with some justice observes, Hemingway's hero does not attempt to comprehend the universe through an ethical system, but perceives it spontaneously, almost physically.

And yet in twentieth century Western literature one would be hard put to find another such hero whose almost corporeal sensation of the world and spontaneous reaction to it so resembled a moral judgement of reality in emotional terms and were so deeply rooted in the moral conflicts of the epoch.

Hemingway's basic theme crystallized at a time of great crisis for European and American capitalism. Never before in the span of two generations had people witnessed so many violent deaths, so sharp a shift from prosperity to hunger, such outbursts of demagoguery, such blatant encouragement of immorality and irresponsibility. Hemingway—and here he can be ranked with many

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humanist philosophers of our century—attempted to comprehend this crisis as one of the greatest ordeals forced on man by history, as a challenge to his dignity and courage.

Hemingway's works chronicle the demoralization of Western society, the spiritual deformity and the fears born of an epoch of political and economic shocks. But above all, he spoke of men who were able to bear the unbearable. Marvelling at the miracle of human endurance, the writer wanted to understand and to express how extraordinary this miracle was and how inherent to history. He had a good understanding of the psychology of nihilism and realized that there was good reason for mankind to despair.

The West German philosopher H. Weinstock once observed that if we bear in mind real, experienced, historical time rather than the conventions of the Gregorian calendar, we should calculate the twentieth century not from January 1, 1900 but from August 1, 1914, the day when the First World War broke out.

Only yesterday, to the rank-and-file participants, it may have seemed that historical events were reasonable and directed to benevolent goals. But in a matter of months or even days they became convinced that there was no guarantee that the existing social order was guided by reason, and that the lofty proclamations on behalf of "nations", "progress", and "civilization" were no more than hypocrisy on the part of the ruling classes in whose interest the world-wide slaughter was commenced. Subsequent events revealed a fact that was even more discouraging: those who had started the war for their own profit were not going to gain very much, for any day might bring economic collapse, destruction, and death to a great part of the productive population. Although the war had economic causes, at a given moment there would no longer be economic or any other sense in it. The historical process had gone beyond the control of reason in all its manifestations, even the cynical rationalism of the businessman. The rulers of Europe

could launch a war and activate huge armies, but, in concert with the whole social system that ensured their supremacy, they could no longer halt the bloody current of events. Without a revolution, society in its blind progress might destroy all civilization.

Horror at unprecedented disasters was combined with indignation at the senselessness, absurdity, and elemental compulsion of events. Men had long ceased to hate the enemy, to envy heroes or to despise deserters. Nothing could bolster the morale of the fighting armies and yet the scale of the war continued to grow, as though the men fanatically thirsted for a fight to the finish. . . . As never before men sensed the unity of the human race, that simple fact that the men beside one in the trenches and the men in the enemy camp were all human beings deserving compassion. At the same time with a concentration and efficiency hitherto unknown mass murders were being committed. . . .

The war was terrible, but it was even more terrible, indeed incomprehensible, to see how easily it was forgotten as a carefree, cynical life style took form in the West towards the end of the nineteen twenties. People acted as though they felt unbearable pain from some earlier discovery. They tried to live comfortably on the slope of a recently extinct volcano, although there was no evidence that the volcano would not erupt again, in a week, a day, or an hour.

Under such conditions, the task of *reminding* people took on tremendous significance. It was crucial to bring to the foreground and elucidate the cruel lessons of the war.

One of the foremost Western artists and journalists to dedicate himself to this task was Ernest Hemingway. His works reveal the bitter truth about existing social order and the reassuring truth about the worth of men.

In *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) the author draws the attention of an elderly lady with whom he had been conversing to an essay entitled "A Natural History of the Dead", which says the following:

"It has always seemed to me that the war has been omitted as a field for the observations of the naturalist. . . .

"...In war the dead are usually the male of the human species, although this does not hold true with animals, and I have frequently seen dead mares among the horses. An interesting aspect of war, too, is that it is only there that the naturalist has an opportunity to observe the dead of mules. In twenty years of observation in civil life I had never seen a dead mule and had begun to entertain doubts as to whether these animals were really mortal. . . .

"...Until the dead are buried they change somewhat in appearance each day. The color change in Caucasian races is from white to yellow, to yellow-green, to black. If left long enough in the heat the flesh comes to resemble coal-tar, especially where it has been broken or torn, and it has quite a visible tarlike iridescence. . . ."1

What is the source of this aloofness, this morbid cynicism, and why does Hemingway insist on maintaining this stance? Why should descriptions of the battlefield be relegated to the naturalist rather than to a historian brimming with commendable moral indignation?

Moral indignation is appropriate when a writer is criticizing man and his intentions. But the results of the war of 1914-1918 were hard to regard as intentional. The actions of men, united in society, have produced something here which in no way differs from the results of a natural catastrophe.

Society's murders, in Hemingway's writings, merge with the sweltering heat, with the merciless sun that deforms corpses, with snow falling in the mountains on crowds of fugitives ("The Snows of Kilimanjaro"), with illness, and the "snares of physiology" (*A Farewell to Arms*). After this it would be improper to contend that society represents the combined strength of many men, defending each from the deathly, destructive processes of nature. How much more convincing seems the opposite conclusion, that society made an agreement with all forces that destroy the lives of men and other

higher mammals. Men, horses, and mules are on one side, on the other are cold, heat, filth, disease-bearing bacteria, guns, howitzers, military formations of all sizes, and multitudes of institutions supporting "the natural course of events".

There was no doubt that the weapons of war were operated by men, but it could also not be denied that millions of soldiers, executing military formations and activating bullets and howitzers, had no desire to kill. Participants in the First World War acutely felt the sensation experienced by veterans of earlier wars, as expressed by Tolstoy in *War and Peace*: "All that time one thought ran through Pierre's mind.... Who was executing, murdering, taking away life.... And Pierre felt that this was no one. It was the order, the mould of circumstances."

This image of society, which suddenly and unexpectedly occurs to Pierre when he sees how the supposed guardians of the law shoot the supposed incendiaries without in the least wishing to do so, was totally incompatible with the concept of Society as conceived by moral idealism, the basic trend of the bourgeois philosophy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These philosophers attempted to depict society as a cultural and spiritual entity in which man could confidently place his trust.

The experiences of Hemingway's heroes contradicted this placid ideology to a greater degree than Pierre's momentary impression. They contained an unspoken, but philosophically significant judgement of a society which had proved itself unworthy of trust, which allowed a world war and called participation in mass murder "the duty of every citizen". To trust in such a society would be senseless and criminal.

It is not difficult to conclude that such a frame of mind not only precluded moral idealism, it undermined the foundations of moral consciousness.

Moral consciousness is based on the conviction that to serve society and its institutions is to serve the people.

In addition to the normal moral obligations to one's fellow men, morality implies certain obligations with regard to the existing social organization and its establishments (loyalty to "the state", "the motherland", "the army" and so on).

For the man sent into the trenches in 1914-1918 such conviction with regard to the existing society was impossible. Having experienced war and seen how it is conducted, the soldiers soon realized the true worth of those abstract concepts meant to arouse moral affectations.

Lofty ideas not founded on a reality that can be trusted and respected are dangerous not simply because they are meaningless, but because there will always be fanatic admirers ready to translate their admiration into deeds, and there will always be Pharisees ready to join fanatics if it is profitable.

Frederick Henry, like thousands of others, saw how high morals are transformed from empty talk to bloody, cruel reality. This occurred during the autumn retreat on the Italian front. The retreat was typical of the First World War, coming with the suddenness of a landslide. It began—no one knows where or how—with the random swarming of armies, followed by the unexpected confusion of units, mass surrenderings, executions of officers, and mass desertion. When the broken confused armies crossed the bridge over the Talliamento, they were met by immaculate and inspired representatives of the field gendarmerie who pulled the officers from the crowd and held a quick court of honor. This was the moral idealism and morality of 1916; those who supported it were criminals, officially encouraged and well rewarded. Their holy language ceased to be a mere means for camouflaging reality; it became the language of the court, sentencing those who had discerned its true contours and dared to act in accordance with their unexacting sober perceptions.

In this way a situation arose where *to be moral meant to be immoral*. This applied both to large and small issues:

to the question of political choice and to one's attitude regarding the elementary rules and conventions of life.

Lieutenant Henry's conversation with his beloved is telling. Henry, with some hesitation, proposes to Catherine that they marry and make their relationship legitimate. She answers him with confidence: " 'But, darling, they'd send me away.' "

" 'Maybe they wouldn't.' "

" "They would. They'd send me home and then we would be apart until after the war.' "

" 'I'd come on leave.' "

" "You couldn't get to Scotland and back on a leave. Besides, I won't leave you. What good would it do to marry now? We're really married. I couldn't be any more married.' "

" 'I only wanted to for you.' "

" "There isn't any me. I'm you. Don't make up a separate me.' "

" "... 'Couldn't we be married privately some way? Then if anything happened to me or if you had a child....' "

" "There's no way to be married except by church or state. We are married privately.' "

" "... All right. But I'll marry you the day you say.' "

" "Don't talk as though you had to make an honest woman of me, darling. I'm a very honest woman. You can't be ashamed of something if you're only happy and proud of it....' "2

In speaking about a concrete, important event in her own life, Catherine Barkley, without realizing it, is commenting on a universal problem: the relationship between morality and moral codes. Her answer is surprisingly simple and clear.

She expresses a general principle common to the finest representatives of the lost generation: to follow a code of ethics is immoral, because in a criminal and inhuman society this code invariably leads to irresponsibility, selfishness, and unscrupulousness. Man is obliged to avoid the temptation of this convenient, advantageous code; this

is the first requirement for maintaining personal self-respect.

In many cases Hemingway views the refusal to trust society and its morally based immorality as a *cleansing of the individual before a revolution*. This cleansing is extremely painful. Psychologically it coincides with the disintegration of the habitual order of things and the deeper the actual devastation wrought by the war, the deeper the cleansing required.

The understanding of one's obligations applying solely as a duty to other people, a sort of morality based on fellowship, prepared a man for the demands of revolutionary solidarity. Only yesterday, soldiers could consider themselves citizens of a given country, members of a particular regiment and company. But today in the whirlpool of war, they were thrown into brief but instructive contact with soldiers who considered themselves citizens of other societies and members of other units. Such groups were formed not by regimental lists, but by misfortune, and one was easily convinced that the strangers deserved sympathy, trust, and compassion. Tomorrow these feelings could give birth to the realization that men are united and divided unjustly by the rules of the existing society, that they should unite in a new way and redefine the battle front.

The war brought society to its melting point; it shook the foundations of existing social institutions. But the magma itself, whose particles were composed of men, was not absolutely amorphous. Viscous, half-hardened clots formed, dispersed, and once again gathered in it. The vortical movement of human masses was subordinated to some ancient laws of communal life, unwritten law of blood-brotherhood.

World War I differed from World War II in that it was unleashed by the capitalist system which had not yet nurtured the "man of war", the indifferent aggressor and murderer.

The war shattered everything which might undergird a man seeking to orient himself in the world on the basis

of rational calculations. It made life and death, victory and defeat, the success of revolution and a sudden coup by reactionary forces equally probable. Everything became possible. In *A Farewell to Arms* we find an extraordinary mixture of expectations, mutually incompatible and yet equally plausible. Some hope that immanent revolution will put a quick end to the war, others hope that soon everyone will "pack up and go home", and still others reckon they won't live to see the end of the war. "Perhaps wars weren't won any more," thinks Frederick Henry. "Maybe they went on forever. Maybe it was another Hundred Years' War. . . ."³ There was nothing a man could rely on, nothing to determine the course of his conduct as he was used to determining it, with hopes of success. For this reason moral requirements acquired an utterly different meaning, particularly the definition of *what should not be done* under any circumstances: killing, looting, contributing to the madness which had descended on the world. The authenticity and blinding force of these commandments was not dependent on historical suppositions; they retained their significance even when the future was seen as utterly hopeless. Those who had not yet ceased to rely on society usually despaired. But those who abandoned these illusions and found meaning only in moral obligations developed a stoic courage.

The feeling of utter uncertainty, a sense that historical meaning was collapsing and giving way to new moral obligations gave rise to the popular position known in the literature of the first post-war years as "quiet heroism of the trenches". Such heroism entailed no great exploits, but rather a stoic, courageous refusal to take part. People remained people with genuine peasant "sluggishness and dullness". In their refusal to follow the path of progress they displayed a "traditional stubbornness"; for "progress" expressed itself in the yearly increase of violent deaths. They sacrificed themselves not for history, but to preserve the human race, to defend it from history; for history has taken the path of madness. There was something of the severe, silent unanimity of spirit of the first

Christian communes in this solidarity, this universal, diffuse, steadfast sabotage of the war.

The quiet hero of the trenches was not an exponent of mature revolutionary aspirations, but he was prepared to accept revolution. Often his political sympathies were not particularly clear, but he refused to reconcile himself to the comforting deception, the half-truths and outright lies which had become an essential condition of "normal life" in bourgeois society. Here was a firm, integral *pre-revolutionary* consciousness, a personality which, as it took form, stood on the threshold of one of the most profound upheavals of bourgeois civilization.

For Hemingway, such a consciousness became a universal measure of truth. In describing a given phenomenon, he seems to ask himself repeatedly what it would have seemed like and meant to the man in the trenches. This man does not appear in Hemingway's works as a leit-motif, but one feels his presence, in the same way as the peasant's presence is felt in Tolstoy's moral and aesthetic treatises.

Hemingway calls upon these silent heroes of the trenches (both the living and the dead) to judge the whole post-war reality of Western society, its way of life, political struggles, morality, and art. Hemingway also tests this society by carefully tracing the fate of a veteran and scrutinizing society's relation to the spiritual world of people who have experienced its crisis to the utmost.

More than once Hemingway claimed that he was speaking in the name of the "lost generation", the young men who went to the front, survived the war and returned home. Why was this generation "lost"?

Some think the name originated because the people of this generation were beaten, spiritually bankrupt, and lost.

It is true that many of the war veterans were "maladjusted". They could not enter into the normal peacetime life and were unable to devote themselves to occupations that were socially useful, to arrange for their

own personal happiness. But it was not their shock at the sight of blood and corpses that produced this reaction. Rather they were incapable of considering life during the mid-nineteen twenties in the West as something normal; they could not force themselves to worry about cradles knowing that infanticide remained an open question.

The "lost generation" was not a generation of people who lost their way in life. It was a generation incapable of reconciling itself to optimistic illusions of prosperity.

Those men who witnessed the war did not simply witness an isolated bloody event and excesses. They witnessed the law and norm of the existing society.

Who, then, was anomalous and could not adjust to historical reality: the men who matured in the trenches, or those who accustomed themselves to the intoxicating fumes of business and stabilization? This is the fundamental theme in Hemingway's works on the post-war period. From the very beginning, the writer saw that the optimism of the times was an illusion. But how did such optimistic illusions arise and what made them possible?

Perhaps millions of people simply had no idea of the meaning of war. Or perhaps they were governed by that unquestioning passion for life that compels a man to make a fresh start, ignoring his losses and defeats, and leaving the dead to bury the dead.

Hemingway insists this was not the case.

All countries felt the effects of the war, and everywhere, even in America, people knew what the war entailed. The writer sees the source of credulous optimism not in ignorance of the war, but in an incomplete, superficial contact with the war, giving rise to *fear*, because the majority of civilians had not experienced the crises and defeats as fully as the soldiers.

It is a well known psychological paradox that a brush with danger makes a man a coward, whereas danger experienced fully inspires new resolution. More often than not, the man who survived was one who experienced the war as a nightmarish hallucination, revealing not the

collapse of society but his own defenselessness, vulnerability, mortality. The war was an experience which showed him his own insignificance and humble station. Naturally he tried to erase it from his consciousness, just as a neurotic attempts to erase all signs of past failure. Hemingway did not believe that the Western countries' readiness to forget about the war was a healthy way of overcoming a past misfortune. Rather it was a pathological form of forgetfulness, an act of irresponsibility on the part of memory, arising out of a need to forget, to dream, to avoid accountability to oneself.

The optimism and efficiency of the twenties should not be confused with a naive love of life. The former were born of fear, spiritual bankruptcy and despair. It is self-affectation on the part of a society trying not to think of its humiliating past and covering its humiliation with routine affairs and concerns. For such a society everything became a narcotic lulling historical consciousness. Earlier there was only one sort of spiritual drug—the consoling falsehoods of religion, but now everything could suit this purpose: economic propaganda, advertisements for new forms of government, alcohol, gambling, eroticism, and, of course, economic sops. These were the best ways to sustain the world-wide neurotic revery.

In 1926 *The Sun Also Rises* (*Fiesta*) came out, a novel with an astonishing philosophy. Suddenly a fresh, clear stream poured into a post-war Western culture oscillating between vulgar self-satisfaction and nihilism, euphoria and despair, drunkenness and sobriety. The personification of this seemingly unthinkable philosophy was a war veteran, a cripple, a typical spiritual representative of the "lost generation".

This novel is an extended answer to official and philistine reproaches accusing veterans of emptiness, callousness, and lack of a taste for life. Hemingway shows that when the veterans were able to escape poverty or the humiliation of accepting meagre charity, they remained the only ones who truly loved life and could resist the universal seductions of a narcotic stupor.

We deliberately insert the stipulations regarding poverty and meagre charity. The fate of war veterans as examined in this work is very much abstracted from truly typical case histories. The novel's heroes are well-off, able-bodied, and unburdened by a family. It is easier for them to remain faithful to a truth once realized through suffering, to feel forever demobilized from society. The cruel lash of necessity and deadening worry about earning one's daily bread do not drive them back. Non-susceptibility to other forms of opium is a matter of personal choice for them, a consciously chosen position.

It is telling that not one of the novel's heroes experiences the intoxication with career and business that characterized bourgeois society in the nineteen twenties. They do not join the hunt for Lady Luck. They are capable, talented people but they understand all too well the meaning of the slogan "success through work".

Like soldiers on leave, the heroes of *The Sun Also Rises* do not attach themselves to those groups to which they belong by virtue of their service obligations in peacetime. What unites them is a common memory of the war, and even more often the silent presence of the war in every conversation and each thought. They are occupied by the same concerns that usually occupy soldiers on leave: how to pass the time. Mr. Fraser in the story "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio" showed that passing the time also involves various forms of opium: "But drink was a sovereign opium of the people", he says, "oh, an excellent opium. . . ."4 Don't the heroes of *The Sun Also Rises* have a passion for this opiate?

Jake, Brett, and Michael all drink, and they drink at times so hard that in Brett's words "no one can catch up with them". Nevertheless one cannot call this drunkenness, because for them wine is not a narcotic. None of them drinks to forget or to find an alibi in irresponsibility.

When, as Jake Barnes says, they are sipping the wine, the essential thing is not the wine but the camaraderie of

the table, and drinking is only a ritual signifying that all present are happy to be in each other's company and speak frankly. "Sipping the wine", the heroes of *The Sun Also Rises* more keenly sense their common isolation from the rest of the world and their past which binds them together and remains with them as a special mark of distinction. When these people "overdo it", amazing things happen to them. Instead of forgetting they begin to recall, and the clearest, most important thoughts creep into their head. Recall what Mr. Fraser says in one of his apter and more sober pronouncements:

"...He knew it very well. It was gone just a little way around the corner in that well-lighted part of his mind that was there after two or more drinks in the evening...."⁵

Jake Barnes feels this most keenly of all. When the bed shakes under him, Jake experiences a moment of speaking unspeakable thoughts, a returning to the basic questions which have been overshadowed by the everyday hustle and bustle. At this precise moment Jake finds formulas which totally express his very being. For example, the following: "I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about."⁶ This idea, the unconditional primacy of a moral position, is already familiar. Spontaneous moral feeling forms the basis for all other attitudes to reality; in its absolute simplicity it has no need for substantiation and relies on the direct testimony of conscience: "...that was morality; things that made you disgusted afterward...."⁷ For Jake intoxication is a time of existential sobering-up, a moment of intense vigilance of consciousness.

"...What about sexual intercourse; was that an opium of the people? Of some of the people. Of some of the best of the people," says Mr. Fraser.⁸

And what about the heroes' sexual relations?

Before answering this question, let me attempt to answer another that is perhaps more basic: why does Hem-

ingway consider sexual relations to be a form of opium which is preferred by the best people?

Hemingway's depiction of love is perhaps the most magnificent and purest in twentieth century American literature. Love represents the integrity of a chosen world, a strong spiritual urge for physical closeness. To spite the hypocrites, one might claim that to love and shun physical intimacy is not only difficult but immoral. But it is also immoral to maintain intimacy when that integrity has disappeared or when one ceased to opt for that world (as in the story "The End of Something"). It is even worse to transform intimacy into a world, that is, to escape from reality through one's beloved. At this point sex becomes an opiate.

True love—and love itself is not an opiate—appears in Hemingway's novels at the height of tragedy when all hope is lost, but when at the same time it is clear that life is worth living. It is no coincidence that we find the finest depictions of love in the most tragic of Hemingway's novels, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Jordan and Maria can love each other for only seventy hours. Their heroic but hopeless struggle lasts for the same amount of time. But by uniting these two planes, Hemingway compresses time and creates the sensation of a moment transformed into eternity: "And if there is not any such thing as a long time," says Jordan, "nor the rest of your lives, nor from now on, but there is only now, why then now is the thing to praise and I am very happy with it. . . ."9

Love replaces nothing, it simply *is*. It is life itself which is sacrificed, and it can be compared to nothing more or less than a goal for which life is sacrificed:

"...I love thee as I love all that we have fought for. I love thee as I love liberty and dignity and the rights of all men to work and not be hungry. I love thee as I love Madrid that we have defended and as I love all my comrades that have died. . . ."10

Where love is the last gamble, the last hope and shelter of human integrity, sincerity and pride, it is doomed and

often becomes a snare. Had Hemingway made love totally accessible to the hero of *The Sun Also Rises* he would have lost him in this whirlpool. The representative of the "lost generation" could drink and not become a drunkard, but he could not love without becoming drugged by love, for the world had no symbols or tasks or obligations which could prevent him from forgetting himself in another person.

Thus Hemingway's hero is susceptible to the opium of sex, the most refined and noble of all opiates. This explains the surprising resolution of the question in *The Sun Also Rises*.

Jake Barnes loves Brett, but retains a vigilant and clear consciousness; he is always face to face with reality. His mutilation guards this vigilance.

The war made Barnes invulnerable to illusions: it castrated him. The impact of that castration is felt throughout the novel, affecting the plot and the sense of time and matter.

In what relation to the world does Jake's mutilation place him? It would seem that he, more than anyone, would have reason to be broken, anaemic, callous. But the novel shows us something totally different.

Of all the heroes in this novel, Jake Barnes is almost the only one capable of forgetting himself in love. Brett never ceases to exist for him; she is an eternal torment, unattainable, unrealizable. Jake's castration saved him not from love but from the possibility of living by love alone; not from emotion but from those hopes which more often than not are based on emotion. The true source of Barnes' suffering is that he cannot confirm the most captivating and full-blooded illusion the world has to offer. He cannot set his hopes on the pleasure of intimacy, on the eternal solitude of two people in love, and on the consolidation of that solitude in wedlock, a home, children, and the envy of all outsiders who witness his happiness.

In Jake Barnes' love there are no sexual or familial life plans which often constitute the last thread connect-

ing an honorable man with the world of ambition, acquisition, and personal careers.

Exaggerated expectations regarding love and marriage are one variant of a consumer ideology (for "some of the people, for some of the best of the people"). Those who cannot be drugged with dreams of a car, clothing or the latest furniture, can be intoxicated with a dream of the most modern type of woman who comes complete with car, clothing, and furnishings.

It is not surprising that one of the most important features of a consumer society is the erotization of culture. Eros is a worldly religion for such a society. The nineteen twenties, which saw the rise of a society oriented to consumption and acquisition, also witnessed the rapid erotization of advertisements, newspapers and mass art, the broad application of sexual theories to personality, mass psychology, ethnography, and even political history.

In Jake's perceptions and descriptions—for he is both the protagonist and narrator of the novel—the lyrical and metaphorical approach to phenomena is missing. He perceives the world with the immediacy and freshness of a child; his is a primordial reality, the simple presence of color, malleability, coldness, sharpness.

Usually a man perceives and describes his environment in terms of a specific goal which inspires him. He views his environment from an ideological, lyrical, erotical or utilitarian point of view according to the demands of a given situation. As soon as such a situation arises, one can no longer speak of open-mindedness or disinterestedness.

But for Jake Barnes there are no such situations. Nothing animates him, and he counts on nothing. Does this mean that his soul is burnt to a cinder and his eyes no longer see?

As it happens this is not the case. Jake is a most typical representative of the "lost generation" and reality exists for him in the very wealth of his existence, not apparent to others. In his descriptions each thing immediately and totally reveals itself. This is the immutable

clarity of the world and selflessness with which one approaches it: the immutable clarity of the grass, trees and sky to a mortally wounded man ("here is everything, there will be nothing more") and the selfless awareness of it all awakening memories of childhood where all was equally interesting, important, captivating, and mysterious.

Jake Barnes' perceptions are constantly at the level of a catharsis, engendered by the war. He sees each thing and each event through the eyes of a soldier on the brink of death. Barnes lives in the consciousness that each moment is priceless; at any given moment the world exists for him for the first and last time. It is as though he has set himself the task of holding on to each experience for eternity and dying with it.

But Jake Barnes is not only a guardian of the impressions of the "trench" heroes; he is also the heir to their historical consciousness. And he is well aware that this consciousness, authenticated by the greatest crisis of bourgeois civilization, has ancient, genuinely popular roots.

The Sun Also Rises tells the story of a trip to Spain for the fiesta. Neither the plot, nor the enthusiasm displayed by Jake Barnes for this fiesta are fortuitous.

In the nineteen twenties and thirties, there was a specific response in Western culture to the life experience of the veteran and his views on post-war life. One can list a series of philosophical and sociological works dealing directly with the "quiet hero of the trenches" 's outlook; their authors said that Versailles only marked the beginning of a breathing spell between two wars, that bourgeois society had only succeeded in temporarily camouflaging the crisis which had revealed itself in the war and in the complex pre-revolutionary fermentation of the masses.

The West European "philosophy of crisis" reached conclusions far different from those drawn by a Marxist analysis of capitalism. At the same time it marked a decisive break with the typical notions of placid liberal

historicism, and once again raised the question of breaks in the continuity of the historical process, the responsibility of the individual in uncertain times, the nature of historical crises and so on.

It was natural that questions of a philosophical and historical nature would occur to people preoccupied with such problems. And judging by *Death in the Afternoon* and his reportage, the same was true of Hemingway.

Indeed is not all human history (judging by past experiences at least) a process in which periods of stabilization are only pauses and breathing spaces? Perhaps all fundamental historical changes have occurred in moments of great crises when any outcome was possible and all depended upon human endurance and courage. And even in the distant past was not there a notion that the state of uncertainty, open struggle, and vulnerability to violent death was a cyclical historical process?

Had Hemingway been a historian, he would have found evidence of such a philosophy almost everywhere. Certainly he would have traced it to the very roots of European civilization, to antiquity, where the popular form of reliving history was the mystery play.

The mystery play was a means for the people to counter forgetfulness and placidity, to dispel the illusion that political institutions were invincible and reliable. Through re-enactment of mysteries, the people reminded themselves of the merciless aspects of reality, of a primeval nature that could suddenly intrude upon an orderly, social world and demand resoluteness, ecstatic inspiration, and belief in the most ancient (pre-social) norms of the human community.

The Spanish fiesta, which arose prior to the Christian era, has much in common with the mystery.

The events of 1914-1918 showed how easily violent death could be tolerated on a mass scale. Millions of people living in developed bourgeois societies found themselves subject to this danger. Whoever forgot this and began to believe that violent death no longer threatened mankind lost the sense of true historical reality.

The fiesta recalled this for Jake Barnes and his friends, for it is based on the people's earnest awareness of risk and impending death and on the clear recognition that men should realize the precariousness of their existence from time to time.

For the Spanish peasant, the fiesta is not a game; it answers a need for a real essential experience. If it were simply a form of amusement, he would hardly risk undergoing the economic deprivations which he submits to for the sake of the fiesta. "The peasants," says Hemingway, "were in the outlying wine-shops. There they were drinking, getting ready for the fiesta. They had come in so recently from the plains and the hills that it was necessary that they make their shifting in values gradually. They could not start in paying café prices. . . . Money still had a definite value in hours worked and bushels of grain sold. Late in the fiesta it would not matter what they paid, nor where they bought. . . ."11

The fiesta is one of the few (in the past there were many) surviving mass enactments of ruin and crisis, the cheapening of morality, and the experience of "doomsday".

It is natural that only in the crowd celebrating the fiesta does Jake Barnes feel at home. Behind the pranks and bacchanalia, the masks of smiling skeletons and wreaths of garlic, he senses the seriousness, the animation and impetuosity of a popular revolt.

With the fiesta comes a sharp break in orderly, day-to-day existence. Human magma breaks through the hard layer of norms and laws and there is a universal outburst of trust and sociability. People refuse to weigh their deeds and acquire a new sense of historical time.

The focal point of the fiesta is the *corrida*, an elaborate ritual ensuring that the matador and bull will engage in the prescribed rules of mortal combat.

Often the matador has been reproached for taking a senseless, unreasoned risk. In Jake Barnes' opinion "nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bull-fighters", and the risk he takes is not senseless. He is not

out to amuse the spectators or receive remuneration. The matador engages in mortal combat to satisfy one of the most essential human needs: the need for a sensation commensurate to that real historical situation which is obscured by daily events and which, upon reflection, can inspire fear and perplexity. While this need persists, the matador is neither a condemned man nor a buffoon.

As for allegations of unreasoned risk, any one of Hemingway's heroes might demonstrate the absurdity of such notions.

To throw oneself at a bull may be reckless, but what isn't reckless?

If behavior which guarantees happiness and success is considered prudent, then in a society where violent death on a massive scale is a constant threat, prudent behavior by definition is impossible. Both the man who guards his life and the man who risks it are risking to the same degree. The only difference is that disaster overtakes the man who is habitually wary unawares, stunning him, paralyzing him, trampling him into the mud, whereas the man who consciously takes the risk retains the pleasure experienced in the struggle. There is no choice between success and misfortune, only between farce and tragedy, the risk of being snared and the risk of mortal combat. In a situation where "everything is possible", frequently one can only choose the recklessness of resignation or the recklessness of valor.

This is one of the fundamental truths that the "lost generation" learned from its experience of the First World War.

A tragic fate seems dark and senseless from the vantage point of a comfortable retreat and in the light of limited perspective on life, where one day is the same as the next and from a distance a noncommittal death-in-bed looms before one. But those who saw how yesterday's inhabitants of comfortable retreats were dressed in soldier's greatcoats, grouped into columns, and stood numb with cold in ditches, their faces frozen with bewilderment, could find the light of reason in a tragic

fate. The enlightened man did not fear death and therefore did not let himself be led like a sheep to the slaughter.

Generally night is seen as suitable for tragedy, dark and terrifying in its mystery and ghostliness. But in fact darkness is the refuge of murder, betrayal, cowardice, and confusion, and mystery represents the cheap sets of melodrama. Tragedy occurs openly, in the bright light of day. *The color of tragedy is white.*

The people who conceived the *corrida* understood this. The spotlight is always on the tragic figure of the matador, none of his actions are hidden. "...The theory, practice and spectacle of bullfighting have all been built on the assumption of the presence of the sun, and when it does not shine over a third of the bullfight is missing. . .,"¹² writes Hemingway in *Death in the Afternoon*.

What do the *corrida* and the mastery of the matador reveal to those who take part in the fiesta? What is most essential? The matador's art consists in taking the maximum risk at each moment.

For those who have experienced the catharsis of the fiesta, the insignificance of the consequences, the innumerable possibilities, the uncertainty and instability of all that is established and known to them, the *corrida* reveals the indisputability of tragic courage, the clarity and beauty of combat, the superb perfection of man in the face of death.

And yet another profound symbol is also revealed to them. The matador's actions are part of a ritual. Each movement corresponds to the familiar and ancient code.

The matador is a man who has voluntarily agreed to risk open combat; for this reason he follows its rules and discipline with absolute precision. Though the public may find itself in alien territory; though it may cease to understand the matador's actions and may demand something else (individual independence, unfettered movements, more of the picturesque), though it may be evident that strict performance of the ritual will mean death; though no one may afterwards understand why

the matador did what he did—he will nonetheless have remained true to his freely taken vow.

The matador's behavior allows us to understand the connection between tragic courage and moral integrity.

Direct moral obligations which have survived the furnace of social crisis are preserved as the immediate authenticity of emotion and the demands of conscience. But a man who has experienced a catharsis and is filled with tragic resolution does not follow these norms because of an emotional attachment or for fear of pangs of conscience; for him they are a chosen ideal of obligatory self-sacrifice. For this reason he ceases to be a submissive victim of the status quo, society's cannon fodder.

Thus the Spanish fiesta and its central event, the *corrida*, have tremendous philosophical and historical symbolism for Hemingway. The representative of the "lost generation" turns to these symbols to affirm those truths revealed by the war, to gain a deeper understanding of them, and clarify them through analysis. Jake Barnes' trip to Spain is no exotic journey. It is a pilgrimage to holy shrines, to the clear source whose waters fortify one's strength and faith.

But already at the beginning of the thirties Hemingway finds that this spring is clouded and befouled. The fiesta has become a means of profit and amusement; the *corrida* has been turned into an opiate (a gallery of horrors); the dangerous bulls are replaced by bulls that merely look fearsome; the matadors are more interested in putting on a show; and the audience includes more and more tourists and fewer Spanish peasants. The edifice of the *corrida* has been shattered. It is no longer a strict ritualization of mortal combat, and at times it turns into an absurd spectacle of murder.

Other oases of tragic action beloved by Hemingway had also been exploited for entertainment and profit, including hunting in Africa, deep sea fishing and sports. Everything that the representative of the "lost generation" had relied on in his rejection of post-war stability, all

rudiments of the ancient enlightened notion of tragedy and combat, had been destroyed or deformed.

In 1934 this theme took an unexpected turn. After the crisis of 1929-1933, it was impossible to regard the conventional arena of the *corrida* as the sole place for testing one's courage. Hemingway asked himself whether resolution and courage were not born in everyday situations which thousands of simple people had to face. Was not the struggle for daily bread the most universal and natural of all tragedies?

In 1934-1936 Hemingway wrote the novel *To Have and Have Not*, his first major work whose hero is a common man. Harry Morgan is an insignificant proprietor on the verge of ruin, the owner of a boat (and at the close of the novel, the owner of a confiscated boat).

The motive of Morgan's actions is economic interest: he worries about the means necessary to survive.

One of the most enduring prejudices of moral idealism was its conviction that economic inducements were among the most primitive of motives (usually placed in the humiliating category of "lust"). It was assumed that such motives could not form a personality, that behavior based on them was hardly distinguished from animal behavior, and that the sense of duty, obligation and responsibility were characteristic of a higher stage. In the nineteen twenties and thirties this prejudice was seized upon by Western sociologists and moulded into a conception of an "economic man" who oriented himself according to purely utilitarian principles and had no notion of an unconditional moral choice.

Let us now examine this "economic man" in Hemingway's novel.

Harry Morgan is a family man. This is an integral, immediate part of his reality. For Harry, as for millions of simple people, economic interest is therefore regarded as a duty to the family. Harry freely chose this responsibility when he led Marie to the altar and he fulfils it strictly. He struggles to earn his bread in a different way than a hungry animal struggles for food; the animal may

surrender or run away if the danger grows too great. Harry fights for subsistence as a zealot fights for an ideal. His "economic" behavior equals self-sacrifice from the very beginning.

Supporting a family is more than a duty for Harry Morgan: it is a measure of self-respect and, as he knows, his right.

If society does not allow him to earn enough to live, a man has a right to support himself through crime, transgressing laws and the moral code in the way sanctioned by his sense of morality.

But doesn't this contradict the very basis of moral responsibility? By breaking the law Harry risks leaving his family without a provider and dooming it to the miserable existence from which he is obliged to save it.

Harry resolves this paradox with surprising simplicity. All things considered, there is no problem of risk, for the risk of hunger is as great in either case. Here is the brief explanation he offers to Albert Tracy before engaging in a dangerous enterprise:

"...I said to him, 'You know I don't want to get in any real trouble, Harry'.

" 'What worse trouble you going to get in than you're in now?' he said. 'What the hell worse trouble is there than starving?'

" 'I'm not starving,' I said. 'What the hell you always talking about starving for?'

" 'Maybe you're not, but your kids are.' "13

Here is a familiar variant of a basic theme: the risks of the war are replaced by the risk of starvation.

There is no choice between risk and prudent behavior, only between the respective risks of acting or waiting; one can be caught and doom one's family to starvation, or one can simply wait for this to happen.

Harry sees no problem of legality or morality in his actions, because there can be no obligations to the legal and moral code of a society that does not permit a man to earn a living.

The only thing that worries Harry is how to commit a

crime without being a bastard. One can rob a bank, but what will happen to the sentry who is an unfortunate family man just like you?

The type of behavior depicted by Hemingway in *To Have and Have Not* soon becomes a model for adventure novels and films where the criminal takes on the aspect of a positive hero. This positive role is ensured by having the criminal prey upon people who deserve to have their property confiscated or to be shot. The criminal becomes a renegade knight who, with enviable courage, carries out unpronounced but just sentences and grows rich from his booty.

Harry Morgan acts more or less in this fashion. But Hemingway, in distinction to those authors of adventure novels and film scripts who learned from him, senses the falsity and internal contradictions of such behavior, forcing Harry Morgan himself in the face of death to repudiate what has seemed to be justified actions.

Morgan is a tragic hero in so far as he prefers the risk of acting with resolution to a senseless refusal to make a decision and act upon it; at the same time he senses that his deeds will not bear the scrutiny of daylight and that he must follow a dark, lonely road.

In agony, scarcely able to control his voice, Harry attempts to express the most important things he has discovered:

“‘A man,’ Harry Morgan said, looking at them both. ‘One man alone ain’t got. No man alone now.’ He stopped. ‘No matter how a man alone ain’t got no bloody chance.’

“He shut his eyes. It had taken him a long time to get it out and it had taken him all of his life to learn it.”¹⁴

Harry’s words reflect more than a longing for comradeship and support. Here is an answer to the basic problem that tormented him, the question of the moral possibility and validity of criminal actions. One cannot take up arms alone, fight for one’s rights in isolation, or put into practice principles which can be realized only by a common uprising.

Does this imply that if a man is alone he is incapable of action and helpless?

Not at all. A man can refuse to act or can disobey orders. Hemingway has a whole separate episode in the novel, recounting the stoic courage of Captain Willy Adams, which demonstrates this point.

Willy takes Senator Frederick Harrison out on his fishing boat. At sea they meet a boat with a contraband cargo (its captain, Harry Morgan, and his Negro helper are wounded). The senator guesses what is afoot and demands that Willy return and help to capture the smugglers and turn them over to the police. Captain Willy refuses.

To Have and Have Not was completed after Hemingway's return from Spain, where he had fought on the Republican side. In many places it is clear that the author is speaking from the perspective of a veteran of that struggle and comparing the man fighting for his daily bread with those who fought a revolutionary war in the interests of all who are oppressed. This explains the writer's scorn for the anarchistic extremes of Harry Morgan's behavior, his condemnation of individual activism, and the new (for Hemingway's heroes) enthusiasm for workers' solidarity, which inspires Willy Adams to take a lonely stand against the authorities.

In *To Have and Have Not* we once again encounter that basic opposition between tragic courage born of total ruin and panic arising from a superficial contact with danger. But now these oppositions characterize two hostile classes: those who have and those who have not. Albert Tracy, Willy Adams, and Harry Morgan are on the brink of poverty, and we watch as resolution grows within them. The wealthy tourists who have come to enjoy themselves in Cuba seem to be carefree, gay and in love with life. In fact they are plagued by hidden anxieties. Their real situation, concealed from outsiders and often from themselves, is one of unstable prosperity, irrationally fluctuating economic status and the threat of ruin.

In *To Have and Have Not* Hemingway finds a lucid formula for contrast which lies at the basis of his works of the twenties and thirties:

"...Henry Carpenter postponed his inevitable suicide by a matter of weeks if not of months.

"The money on which it was not worth while for him to live was one hundred and seventy dollars more a month than the fisherman Albert Tracy had been supporting his family on at the time of his death three days before. . . ."15

This burdensome sensation of anxiety and irrelevance is suppressed with the help of opiates—primarily voyages and love.

The parade of "haves" in the novel begins with the colorful figure of Mrs. Laughton, a woman built like a prizefighter, who answers any problem she is confronted by with the word: "nerts", and desires Harry Morgan because his nose has been broken. Richard and Helen Gordon play out an extended tragicomedy in three parts: first the farce of unfaithfulness, then the farce of jealousy, and finally the farce of parting. For a brief time, the well-to-do prostitute Hélène Bradley appears on stage. . . .

How do such people define their calling?

Some are occupied with business, but most dedicate themselves to literature. Everyone writes. We meet "the writer" Gordon, "the writer" Laughton, and discover that even Mrs. Laughton could also write. None of them risks recounting his own experiences, each loves to discourse on subjects with which he has had no contact.

Writers like Richard Gordon mostly write falsehoods about the people.

The only experiences they have at their disposal are sexual experiences. Therefore they explain life by categorizing phenomena on the basis of sexual relations, norms, and deviations. Any problem—the mystery of creation, the origin of consciousness, or the impetus of popular movements—is quickly rendered comfortable and comprehensible when transformed into a problem of the sexes.

Richard Gordon openly tries to transform the problem

of the working class into a sexual problem. Here Hemingway employs an extraordinarily powerful device: he forces "the writer Gordon" to speak out on a problem already exposed and explained by the writer Hemingway.

Harry Morgan, like many of Hemingway's tragic heroes, has a happy love life. At forty-two, Marie Morgan loves her husband as much as she loved him at twenty. Nights are a joy to her. She envies turtles who, she had heard, can live together for days and nights. And after the chapter recounting Harry Morgan's struggle and death (Marie does not know yet, although she has a premonition of her husband's tragic end), Hemingway inserts a short chapter which includes the following passages:

"The next morning in Key West Richard Gordon was on his way home from a visit to Freddy's Bar where he had gone to ask about the bank robbery. Riding his bicycle, he passed a heavyset, big, blue-eyed woman, with bleached blonde hair showing under her old man's felt hat, hurrying across the road, her eyes red from crying. Look at that big ox, he thought. What do you suppose a woman like that thinks about? What do you suppose she does in bed? How does her husband feel about her when she gets that size. Who do you suppose he runs around with in this town? Wasn't she an appalling looking woman? Like a battleship. Terrific.

"He was almost home now. He left his bicycle on the front porch and went in the hallway, closing the front door the termites had tunnelled and riddled. . . .

"He sat down at the big table in the front room. He was writing a novel about a strike in a textile factory. In to-day's chapter he was going to use the big woman with the tear-reddened eyes he had just seen on the way home. Her husband when he came home at night hated her, hated the way she had coarsened and grown heavy, was repelled by her bleached hair, her too big breasts, her lack of sympathy with his work as an organizer. He would compare her to the young, firm-breasted, full-lipped little Jewess that had spoken at the meeting that evening. It was good. It was, it could be easily, terrific, and it was

true. He had seen, in a flash of perception, the whole inner life of that type of woman.

"Her early indifference to her husband's caresses. Her desire for children and security. Her lack of sympathy with her husband's aims. Her sad attempts to simulate an interest in the sexual act that had become actually repugnant to her. It would be a fine chapter.

"The woman he had seen was Harry Morgan's wife, Marie, on her way home from the sheriff's office."¹⁶

This excerpt is an extended treatment of Hemingway's concept of the immorality of art.

Art inevitably becomes immoral if the artist lacks what might be called receptivity or an ability to understand. The narcissistic infatuation of the artist with his own first impressions is immoral. And it is doubly immoral if his own life experience and that of his social class are known to be meagre and unscrupulous.

In his depiction of "the rich man's art" in *To Have and Have Not* Hemingway summarizes a complex and worrisome theme.

We often find "pseudo" artists in Hemingway's works and as a rule they are satirized; but one senses an underlying tension, as though the writer were trying to free himself of something that clings obstinately to him.

Hemingway deliberately has "the writer Gordon" express his opinion on subjects on which Hemingway writes.

The art of the nineteen twenties and thirties was often no more than a cheap parody of Hemingway's tragic themes. It was a vulgar twin rather than something openly alien to Hemingway's work.

Hemingway depicts a cruel, unbearable society which tempted man to forget his responsibilities, but he also showed that there were people in this society who could endure the unendurable and remain true to their moral tenets. Here was a tragic appeal to human dignity and courage.

His imitators concentrated exclusively on the first aspect, presenting a cosy picture of a universal night-

mare—cosy because it implies no sort of commitment. Such images of an incorrigibly evil world were only sops to the cowardly and overprudent, convincing those for whom it was advantageous of the vanity of this world. The result was a pseudo-tragic, nihilistic appeal to human cowardice.

Hemingway above all despised those artists who cheated at tragedy, who attempted to speculate in death, illness, poverty and despair. For he recognized and hated those evils more than any one else could.

In *A Moveable Feast* Hemingway creates the following scene. The rich are like a large fish in need of spiritual food. They are fed by those who assert that one has the right to feast during plague, and that the more terrible the plague, the more reason there is to feast.

Ahead of the big fish is the pilot fish, the “man of taste” who has a professional or semi-professional ability to sniff out those writers who are inclined to produce spiritual food for the big fish. The pilot fish appears before the writer in the form of a critic, a publisher, or a family friend. Hardly has he crossed the threshold, when this new friend begins to offer praise, encouragement, consolation, reassurance, and admonitions.

After the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*, which first brought Hemingway prominence and fame, the pilot fish appeared at his door, followed by the self-same rich.

But the pilot fish had been mistaken. He took the novel of the “lost generation” to be a novel of a thoughtless life, of refined brutality behind which people hid from bad memories of the war. At first, the writer himself was deceived; he took the pilot fish to be qualified, disinterested judge who was offering an honorable evaluation of his work:

“...In those days I trusted the pilot fish as I would trust the corrected Hydrographic Office Sailing Directions for the Mediterranean, say, or the tables in Brown’s Nautical Almanac.... I was as trusting and as stupid as a bird dog who wants to go out with any man with a gun, or a trained pig in a circus who has finally found someone

who loves and appreciates him for himself alone. That every day should be a fiesta seemed to me a marvellous discovery. I even read aloud the part of the novel that I had rewritten, which is about as low as a writer can get. . . .

"When they said, 'It's great, Ernest. Truly it's great. You cannot know the thing it has', I wagged my tail in pleasure and plunged into the fiesta concept of life to see if I could not bring some fine attractive stick back, instead of thinking, 'If these bastards like it what is wrong with it?' "17

From 1927 on, Hemingway took care not to fall into the trap of credulity. He resorted to special devices to make the reader aware of the profound difference between the author's real intentions and the interpretations of those who created literary modes. One such device was the introduction of the "pseudo-artist" who vulgarizes and distorts Hemingway's themes.

The greater his fame, the more he was tormented by the knowledge that his vulgar double, his irreconcilable literary enemy, was not simply another person, but Hemingway himself as depicted in bourgeois criticism and in the media. The true image was gradually pushed into the background by the parodic figure of the writer's double, the figment of biographers, critics, and script-writers. In the forties and fifties dubious legends about Hemingway had begun to overshadow his works. The writer's face became familiar to people who had never taken the trouble to understand his hero. Portraits of the amazing old man hung on the walls of homes where not one of his books could be found. The Hemingway hero was gradually made to fit the philistine mould of the "he-man". The works of the man who sang the praises of the fiesta shared the same fate as the fiesta itself; an image of tragic courage became a source of entertainment to those for whom it was by nature incomprehensible and alien.

In the late fifties his image was blatantly cheapened. In the popular mind he became known as a "fearless big

game hunter who appears to have perished somewhere in the jungles of Africa", an amateur boxer who, if the need arises, can knock out a critic who offends him, or a carefree globe-trotter who has visited every corner of the world.

In Hemingway's lifetime, these fictions—far clumsier than fact—were shattered from time to time by the voice of the writer himself. Today that voice is silent, and the task of defending the genuine spirit of his works is all the more crucial and complex.

Hemingway was not one to pin his hopes on the inevitability of a perfect society on earth. At the same time he strongly opposed apathy and despair. He believed that man could not be made to accept violence, immorality, and economic injustice, and had faith in the invincibility of true morality. He believed in that strength and firmness which allows a slender blade of grass to push through the pavement each spring.

NOTES

- ¹ Ernest Hemingway, *Winner Take Nothing. A Natural History of the Dead* (from the book *Death in the Afternoon*), Lnd., 1933, pp. 137, 138, 139, 143.
- ² Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, N. Y., 1969, pp. 115-16.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- ⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio*, N.Y., 1933, pp. 218-19.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.
- ⁶ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, N.Y., 1956, p. 148.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio*, p. 18.
- ⁹ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Phyladelphia, 1940, p. 146.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.
- ¹¹ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, p. 152.
- ¹² Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, p. 21.
- ¹³ Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, Lnd., 1937, p. 99.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-75.
- ¹⁷ Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, Lnd., 1964, p. 190.

R. ORLOVA

RICHARD WRIGHT: WRITER AND PROPHET*

1. A NEW ANGER

Four young blacks are swimming in a forest stream. A white woman approaches the shore where their clothes are lying. When she sees the four naked black boys she is seized by fright; her companion, an officer, kills two of them. The oldest and strongest black manages to tear the weapon away from him and kills the murderer. The police and a lynch mob search for the two surviving youths. They capture one, pour tar over him and set him on fire. The other strangles the search dog chasing him, hides for a time, then climbs into a truck headed for the distant North. . . .

So runs Richard Wright's first story, "Big Boy Leaves Home", from his first book, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938). This son of Uncle Tom, in contrast to his gentle "parent", grabs a gun and kills a white man. In the story we hear curt, vulgar slang and the story develops at a rapid pace, making more use of dialogue—direct speech and direct clashes—than descriptions. But Big Boy becomes Bigger; Bigger rhymes with nigger. Bigger kills a rat which has frightened his mother and sister; the rapacious creature throws itself on him, fiercely defending its evil existence.

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So begins Richard Wright's first novel, *Native Son* (1940). Bigger Thomas is the elder son in a poor black family. His father was lynched in the South; his mother takes the three children North, where they take shelter in the slums of Chicago. Bigger gets a job as a chauffeur for the family of a white millionaire. The white boss, his blind wife and their garrulous cook treat the clumsy, morose, reserved black boy with kindness. The millionaire's daughter is a student and her boy-friend is a communist. He is the first white to extend the hand of friendship to Bigger. These young whites treat him as an equal: they seat him at the same table in a restaurant and they drink rum from the same bottle. But the familiarity of the whites only irritates and antagonizes Bigger, and their talk of equality only intensifies his distrust, frightens him because he cannot understand it, and evokes impotent rage. The drunken chauffeur drives the intoxicated girl back home and, full of rage and lust, drags her to bed. At precisely that moment the girl's blind mother appears in the doorway. Bigger is terrified—they might discover the black boy standing next to a white lady's bed—so hastily, impetuously, he covers her head with a pillow, presses down and smothers the girl. Then he hides the body and burns it, lying about the whole incident to his masters and the cook. He experiences no pangs of remorse—he goes about calmly eating, sleeping, entertaining his friends, making love to his black girl-friend. At moments he even experiences a previously unknown feeling of pride, of happy, intoxicating self-confidence at the thought that he has killed the daughter of a white millionaire.

In order to cover up his tracks and get some money he writes a letter to his master, making it look like the communists have kidnapped his daughter and are demanding a ransom. The nineteen-year-old boy from the black ghetto who is rude and brash with his family and friends, who is tightlipped and laconic around whites, who has never thought seriously about his own life, of life around him and knows only the shortest, simplest thoughts and

dull, ordinary passions—this boy, in the days following this unintentional act of murder, comes to a new knowledge of himself—just look what he's managed to do! A previously unknown, unprecedented feeling of strength wells up inside him. "Because he could go now, run off if he wanted to and leave it all behind, he felt a certain sense of power, a power born of a latent capacity to live."¹

Bigger confesses his crime to his girl-friend, but then, fearing that she might give him away or prove to be a burden, he kills her as well. He kills her consciously, in cold blood, and then runs away; he is pursued by police and captured in an exhausted and stupefied state, the result of this unusual *mélange* of feelings—self-confident strength and terror. In court he is defended by an old white lawyer, a communist. At the time Wright himself was a communist, joining with others of the same persuasion to discover the America of the insulted and the injured.

Trying at once to rouse the judges' pity and understand the defendant's personality himself, the lawyer says that Bigger did not commit murder out of criminal instincts, which the prosecuting attorney falsely attributes to the entire black race, but rather because of the terrible, ugly life the defendant has led. The omnipotence of white racists doomed the black youth to a life of fear and desperation, which suppressed his thoughts and stifled his kind feelings. The end result was that he became a murderer, not because he was bloodthirsty, but because he was confused and frightened. But in the death room, conversing with his lawyer, the first white man he trusts and treats as a friend, Bigger proposes a different explanation for his fate. He repents of nothing, feels no pity and is not afraid to die. Again he experiences proud satisfaction for having rebelled and asserted himself: " 'I ain't trying to forgive nobody and I ain't asking for nobody to forgive me. I ain't going to cry. They wouldn't let me live and I killed. Maybe it ain't fair to kill, and I reckon I really didn't want to kill. But when I think

of why all the killing was, I begin to feel what I wanted, what I am. . . .

“‘I didn’t want to kill! . . . But what I killed for, I *am*! It must’ve been pretty deep in me to make me kill! I must have felt it awful hard to murder.

“‘What I killed for must’ve been good! . . . It must have been good! When a man kills, it’s for something. . . . I didn’t know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for ’em.’ ”²

In this book we hear with even greater clarity than in the earlier stories a new language—precipitate, daring free, breaking all the rules of grammar, syntax and orthoepy, coarse, naive, forceful—the triumphantly vivid street language of blacks. This is the speech of those half-literate black boys who left the dusty roads and sleepy hamlets of the South with their inexorable barriers partitioning off enclaves “only for whites”, boys who headed north to seek their fortune in the great cities with their deafening roar and hubbub and blinding lights, their multi-colors, the suffocating fumes of countless cars and factories, the fragrance of unknown spices. . . . And in Wright’s prose, with its overpowering confused articulation, we experience distinctly, with all five senses, what his heroes see, hear, smell, touch and taste.

This is a polyphonic novel, a work of the same genre as that first exploited by Dostoyevsky and analyzed by the Soviet philosopher and critic M. Bakhtin. It is true that in the polyphony of *Native Son* one voice clearly predominates—predominates, but does not suppress the other voices. And when Bigger speaks about himself and the surrounding world, when he expresses thoughts and feelings which would seem to be completely inaccessible to his primitive consciousness, his language is most easily understood and evaluated if we proceed from the definition of literary polyphony provided by Bakhtin: “What the hero says about himself and about the world is just as weighty as the author’s usual commentary; the hero’s voice is not subordinated to his objective image, functioning merely as one of his characteristics, but at the same

time it does not serve as the author's mouthpiece. It has an exclusive independence in the structure of the work; it exists, as it were, side by side with the author's voice and is combined in a special way with that voice and with the voices of the other heroes."³

Inherent to all of Wright's works is an intensely dynamic dramatic quality which manifests itself above all in dialogue, in contradictions which are expressed, so to speak, in a primordially dialogic fashion, with speech running against speech; yet another dialectics of consciousness and sub-consciousness is manifested clearly for the first time precisely in this novel: the dialectics of love and hate simultaneously, of attraction and repulsion, fear and courage, despair and self-assertion. This internal "dialogism" undoubtedly accounts in part for the frenzied force of the spoken dialogues.

The attempt to solve insoluble contradictions and to explain the inexplicable also results in failures. Such is the case, for example, in the concluding part of the novel, where the internal dialogue of the author is divided between two characters. The lawyer Max is called upon to provide theoretical interpretations, to examine the hero and events from the social and psychological points of view; but Bigger in his cries and mutterings blurts out tormenting truths that are difficult to express, truths which Wright the artist more easily felt than understood, often contrary to Wright the thinker.

Native Son brought fame to Wright both in the United States and abroad, and became the first bestseller by a black author. The Russian translation appeared in 1941.

* * *

A black man falsely accused of murdering a white woman "confesses" to the crime after being beaten up by the police, but later he escapes and hides in the sewer system of the city. There, in the stench and darkness, he finds sanctuary. The first thing he has to do is fight off

a rat (as in *Native Son*). He crosses stinking, fetid streams, stepping across piles of garbage and carcasses, and finds a relatively dry place where he builds himself a lair; from time to time he goes out to buy food and tobacco. Through a basement window he witnesses a service in a black church. "Pain throbbled in his legs," the author writes, "and a deeper pain, indeed, at the sight of those black people groveling and begging for something they could never get, churned in him."⁴ He glances into a film theatre without seeing the screen, only the audience. "These people were laughing at their lives, he thought with amazement. They were shouting and yelling at the animated shadows of themselves."⁵ In the basement of a funeral parlor he glances over the elegant coffins with their corpses mummified and made up for burial. He robs the safe in a storehouse and a jewelry store, then papers the wall of his hideout with hundred dollar bills, hangs up the jewels and strews them about the floor, "decorating" his lair with gold watches and diamond pendants. This desperately absurd game parodies the "American Dream", parodies the story of the hidden treasure discovered by Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Later on he watches the police torture the firm's guard, convinced that he is the one who robbed the safe; the guard in despair commits suicide.

Hidden away in his underground hideout the black man forgets his own name, but from this vantage point, from the depths of this cesspit, he witnesses life and death, the church, art and wealth. He witnesses and experiences the dream and reality of America and comes to the realization that "all the people I saw was guilty . . . I'm guilty".⁶ And in this doubly black mind a ray of hope suddenly appears: "...when I looked through all of those holes and saw how people were living, I loved 'em. . .".⁷ And so he goes to the police and tries to tell them about himself, about his sanctuary in the sewers. But they neither hear nor understand him (this story, written in 1944, was the first to give forceful expression to the theme of alienation, a leitmotif in the literature of the

sixties). The police later identify him, but by that time they no longer need him because they have found the real murderer of the white woman. The black man is even a hindrance to them. And when he crawls through the sewer hatch to show them the way to his sanctuary, they simply shoot him down.

The characters that move through his early stories and books have the same background as Wright himself, who was the son of a share-cropper and a school teacher; while he was still a young boy his father abandoned the family. From his earliest years he knew hunger, fear in the face of violence, persecution, the humiliation suffered by "niggers", a half-conscious craving for refuge and shelter. As a four-year-old, embittered by the cruel regimentation at home, he nearly burned down the house, then crept into the basement to avoid being punished; his mother gave him such a beating that he was ill for a long time and he never forgot his mother's rage and frenzy caused by fear. He still could not read, and the adult ne'er-do-wells around him would drag him off to the tavern and force him to drink whiskey and teach him filthy language. As a ten-year-old he worked as a paper boy, but when he found out that the newspaper he was selling derided and cursed the blacks, he quit the job, gave up earning a regular salary and again went hungry. Later he worked as a dishwasher, a messenger boy, a waiter, an unskilled laborer and a postal worker.

As an adolescent he witnessed crime, debauchery, self-interested and senseless cruelty. He was not only a victim, but also a participant in violent acts; he was not only deceived, but himself lied and shammed and swindled. All this one can find in his autobiographical story "Black Boy" (1945). This narrative of his life, the fate of one black boy who inhabits the underground world, became an artistic generalization, the story of many generations of black boys who left their patriarchal Southern communities only to fall into the cesspits of the Northern ghettos, to wander and perish in the asphalt jungles of big cities. But the truth of "Black Boy" is broader and more mean-

ingful, for it personifies the deadening horror that marks the existence of all men, black and white, deprived of their childhood and youth, who become the stepchildren of contemporary urban civilization.

It would seem that Wright achieved everything he had strived for, everything that countless thousands of his countrymen dreamed about: Hollywood was preparing to film *Native Son*, his novels and stories were being staged on Broadway, he was lauded in newspapers and magazines and awarded literary prizes. But after "Black Boy" Wright remained silent for eight years. He abruptly changed the course of his life, left the party and abandoned America. He shook off the dust of his homeland and became America's prodigal son.

Cross Damon (the name implying a composite of the cross and the devil) is an ordinary black postal worker. An unknown black is killed under the wheels of the subway train and the mutilated corpse is identified as that of Cross Damon. This gives the man unexpected freedom, for now he can begin life over again. When he is recognized by one of the postal clerks, Cross Damon kills the man who might give him away. He then travels to New York, where he settles in with the family of a communist who is at odds with the landlord, a fascist: Damon lives among men, but at the same time lives underground; he becomes the unwilling witness to a fight and kills both opponents, but in such a way that it appears the men killed each other. Soon after the widow of the friend he has killed takes him as her lover; when she learns the truth of her husband's death she commits suicide. Her husband's comrades kill Cross Damon. This novel, *The Outsider* (1953) was written in Paris in the years when Wright was mainly preoccupied with philosophy, drawing closer to the existentialists and forming an acquaintance with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. In this book, written far from the author's homeland and after a long interruption in his creative work, we seem to hear the same language spoken earlier by Wright's heroes; the descriptions of cruel reprisals,

humiliation and death are as persistently merciless as before, and secret thoughts, suppressed and half-conscious feelings and the sudden surfacing of blind instincts are presented with the same penetrating force. Things are the same in almost all respects. But it is precisely the word *almost* that must be stressed. If we look and listen attentively and get a firmer grasp of the work, it becomes clear that in the words of the characters and of the narrator the author is repeating himself, imitating himself, deliberately stylizing the work and coolly simulating burning passions.

In Paris Wright wrote mainly works of publicistic nature.

In 1954 Ghana became the first African country to establish self-rule and Wright decided to go there, to the home of his ancestors.

He described this journey in the book *Black Power* (1954). We see the famous American writer travelling in a comfortable cabin aboard an ocean-going vessel headed from Liverpool to the west coast of Africa. But his thoughts and observations are interspersed with scenes from another journey. We enter the stifling hold of a ship crammed with blacks, hungry, thirsty, in mortal anguish, bound in chains and stocks, suffering from wounds, and we see white slave-traders transporting their cargo along the same route, but in the opposite direction, from Africa to Liverpool. That was how the ancestors of the lyrical hero and author of the book embarked on their "travels". *Black Power* opens with a dedication to the "Unknown African who, because of his primal and poetic humanity, was regarded by white men as a 'thing' to be bought, sold, and used as an instrument of production; and who in the forests of West Africa, created a vision of life so simple as to be terrifying, yet a vision that was irreducibly human. . .".⁸

Wright wanted to understand Africa, to understand and explain to others. For the first time he saw a country where whites were in the minority. For the first time he felt the African sun, breathed in the smells of Africa,

heard African songs. "Black Power"—those two words combined together in his essays were to become a militant slogan ten years later. "Black Power!"—thousands of young African blacks would write those words in leaflets and newspapers, would shout them out and chart them at meetings and demonstrations and student gatherings.

But Africa did not—and could not—become Wright's new homeland, though he, like many of his peers and contemporaries in America, felt, or rather wanted to feel, a dual spiritual citizenship—American and African. But his voluntary exile brought on an insurmountable, ever increasing longing for his real homeland which was there, on the Mississippi, where his life had begun. To his surprise he came to realize that he loved, despite his hate and anguish, really loved those dirty streets and lots, the colorful and noisy slums of Chicago and New York, the places where he had passed through youth and young manhood so quickly and heedlessly.

Wright's nonfiction works—*The Color Curtain* (1956), essays on his travels through Indonesia, *Pagan Spain* (1957), a story of his trip to Spain, and *White Man, Listen!* (1957), a collection of essays and speeches—are passionate homilies in the form of travel notes and political pamphlets which are full of philosophical speculation. These books cite historical episodes, figures and facts, ethnographic and sociological observations. But they are a far cry from being dispassionate information and objective research. The author is openly and vehemently biased. On almost every page his voice resounds, sometimes rising to a fever pitch, "Listen, whitey! This is how it was and this is how it is, and you're the guilty one!"

Wright was an active participant in the first African cultural congresses. The social and political theories which he developed in his essays, speeches and books are naive and more than doubtful. Thus, for example, in his "Open Letter to Nkrumah" which concludes the book *Black Power*, he called for the total militarization of African states, who would have to fight against the whites and

against tribal chieftains. Wright proved to be a poor prophet, but he was capable of expressing the rage and pain of his blood brothers.

* * *

In a Southern town the son of a rich black businessman, a nervous and impressionable young boy, clashes from the very first with that terrible reality to which "colored" residents of the South are doomed: he witnesses a lynching, the brutal murder of a young boy to whom a white whore had attached herself, followed by a pogrom carried out by a white mob in the black districts of the town. From childhood he has lived in an atmosphere of constant, humiliating fear. His father runs a respectable funeral parlor for blacks, a front for his racket. He makes a fortune on death and dissipation. Often he buries those who have died violent deaths, continuing to ingratiate himself with the white murderers and bribing the police, whom he hates. He instills his son with cynical pragmatism, and his son in turn becomes an egocentric, clever, and completely amoral youth totally "free" of principles and a sense of responsibility. He tries in vain to live completely on his own. He desires in vain to concern himself only with material gain, contemptuously isolating himself from the poverty of his people and all blacks in general. He servilely waits upon the white chief of police, participates in his dirty dealings—collecting "revenue" from the town's prostitutes—and in every possible way indulges the white "gentlemen", whom he hates and despises almost as much as his black brothers and the prostitutes who provide his income. But both his own self-willed independence and the prosperity of his father, a strong, intelligent, rich black man, prove to be imaginary.

This is *The Long Dream* (1958), Wright's last novel. In the development of the plot we see the sure, skillful hand of a master who has learned much from the detective novel, one of the sources accounting for the dynam-

ism of *Native Son*. In modeling his characters, drawing individual fates, human interrelations and social conflicts, the artist's vivid memory and fantasy are inseparable from the speculative dialectics of the existentialist philosopher, the generalized notions of the sociologist and Freudian psychoanalyst. But like the considerably weaker *The Outsider*, this account of an endless dream gleams only with the reflected light of fires burning in the past. Nonetheless in this last novel, as in Wright's earliest stories and in everything he wrote—in each line of his early verses and in the mature prose of his literary and political journalism—there appears with penetrating distinction that live nerve running through all his work and arousing the principal driving impulses of his theme, images, artistic generalizations and lyrical rhetoric. That nerve is the tormenting, unrelieved, unrelenting pain of black America, the pain brought on by three centuries of suffering, humiliation and profaned hopes, the pain of being an outcast, the pain of common and personal alienation, of suicidal, merciless self-knowledge, the pain of the tragically unresolved contradictions between people of different races but one land and culture, between people of one race but different social standing and world outlooks, and finally, simply between different people, different in their joys and misfortunes, their love and hate, their dreams and memories, but living at one time in the same place, the same home, city, country, planet.

2. A NEW WORD

"I wondered if there had ever been in all human history a more corroding and devastating attack upon the personalities of men than the idea of racial discrimination. . . . Being an organic part of the culture that hated him, the black man grew in turn to hate in himself that which others hated in him. But pride would make him hate his self-hate. . . .

"I did not feel that I was a threat to anybody; yet as soon as I had grown old enough to think, I had learned

that my entire personality, my aspirations, had long ago been discounted; that, in a measure, the very meaning of the words I spoke could not be fully understood. . . . I sensed that Negro life was a sprawling land of unconscious suffering, that there were but few Negroes who knew the meaning of their lives, who could tell their story.”⁹

So wrote the author in his autobiographical story, “Early Days in Chicago” (1945), which fifteen years later and under a new title (“The Man Who Went to Chicago”) was chosen by Wright as the concluding work in the collection *Eight Men*, the last book which the writer himself prepared for print and which was published posthumously in 1961.

In “Black Boy”, written at about the same time as “The Man Who Went to Chicago”, the author recalls his youth: “I was frightfully tightlipped. I wanted to say things but could not so much as move my tongue.”

*While the street goes writhing in dumb pantomime
with nothing to shout and speak with.*

Mayakovsky, the poet of the Russian Revolution, heard this silence and searched for “exact and naked” words that the street might utter.

As a black youth Wright heard the silence of the black street, the dumbness of millions of black Americans. As a fifteen-year-old school boy he published his first story in a black newspaper. Up to this time he had been taught by his strict religious grandmother, who forced him to listen for hours as she read the Gospels and sang the Psalms, and by black school teachers in various Southern cities where his unfortunate family sought refuge. In these schools he was taught to submit to necessity, to “know his place”, and in accordance with the holy laws of the Gospels, to love his enemies, love all white ladies and gentlemen, who treated their black servants with disdain and contempt, to forgive them their arrogance and beatings and even murders, to forgive the reprisals of lynch mobs. He was taught to respect the laws and

language of white America, to speak "correctly", i.e., to imitate the orators and preachers of white America. But even as a boy he rebelled, rejecting these lessons of submissiveness, gentleness, common sense, these admonitions of the church and the school. For it was precisely at this time, during his rebellious childhood and school days, that he was amazed by a discovery—the tremendous power of the word. By chance he read a magazine article which angrily denounced H. L. Mencken's books and called their author an "enemy of America", an unscrupulous scoffer who held nothing sacred; Wright wanted to know what sort of books these were that could evoke such rage. But the library was only for whites. So he slyly composed a note—"Dear Madam: Will you please let this nigger boy . . . have some books by H. L. Mencken?" and began to borrow books for a fictitious white gentleman. He began with the American novels described by Mencken. But once he began to read, he could not stop; during his brief moments of leisure or when he was hungry and out of work he read Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson, read novels and poetry, philosophical works and political brochures, read Dostoyevsky and Joseph Conrad, read *Capital* and *The State and Revolution*.

His reading opened up new worlds for him and aroused new thoughts, desires, dreams, the urge to search out and understand the meaning of life—his own and that of others in a similar position to his own who lived in America and elsewhere. This urge led him out of his dumbness. And his own flashes of insight became discoveries in the world of language. Like his hero, the inhabitant of the sewers, he felt that "sooner or later he would go up into that dead sunshine and somehow say something to somebody about all this".¹⁰ And from his first stories to *Native Son*, to his last stories and novels the marks of punctuation that appeared more frequently than all others were quotation marks and dashes, the signs of direct discourse. The story "Man, God Ain't Like That" (1960) consists entirely of uninterrupted dialogue without a

single "stage-direction". But here this particular feature of Wright's prose is reduced to an absolute and becomes nothing more than a device, a frozen form, a dead cocoon abandoned by the butterfly it once held. But in his major and best works Wright is remarkable for having been the first to let American blacks speak for themselves. Not the educated, well-bred blacks who tried to speak with the same refined accents as their sophisticated white colleagues, but the half-literate emigrants of the cotton fields and little towns of the South, the inhabitants of the black ghettos of Memphis, Chicago and New York, and above all the recalcitrant children of Uncle Tom who secretly, slyly or in rage and frenzy set themselves in opposition to Jim Crow and hated white America.

Black slang had been known earlier as well, but only as the property of farce and jokes, of newspaper parodies or malicious lampoons; in *belles lettres* it was treated at best with sentimental stylization or as a good comic device in the spirit of Falstaff, as for example in the speech of nigger Jim, the friend of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Richard Wright heard anew—one could say he practically discovered—the genuine language of black America, the seething, confused articulation of black dialogue, the cross-fire of quarrels and cries, the burning stream of spoken and unspoken monologues flowing, now leisurely, now rapidly, now in a stammering staccato, now in a broad stream—but always breathing with life and warmth like a stream of lava, a scorching eruption or a stream strewn with refuse and ashes and secretly seething. And this language as employed by Wright in his stories and novels embodied the tragic contradictions and intense drama of the human condition, the most complex existential problems of his country and times, embodied them with such poetic force that the language became intelligible to other peoples.

Wright's poetic and artistic world outlook is uniquely individual; it is expressed in the dynamic drama of language and plot, in the musical rhythm of internal structure and external forms of narration and in the inexora-

bly cruel accumulation of detail used to describe scenes of violence and humiliation, to reveal the base thoughts and base motives of his characters. But many "external" sources found in American and foreign literary traditions contributed to the graphic originality of his prose. He drew above all from the tradition of American realistic and naturalistic prose, the prose of Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, the heritage of black American folklore, and also, both directly and through various belletristic media, the poetics of Dostoyevsky, in which the artistic representation of the world is imbued with the search for life's secret essence and moral purpose.

Black melodies and folk tales, sad and funny facts and fables are all directly reflected in the speeches and songs resounding from the pages of his books, in his character descriptions and in certain features of the narrative structure such as the ordering of contents in his novels and collections of stories. The three parts of *Native Son* are titled "Fear", "Flight", and "Fate", making the first line of the novel in fact an alliterative line of verse, a tuning fork setting the tone of the narrative. The title of the last novel, *The Long Dream*, is symbolically significant, and the titles of the three parts are united by their imagery and by their rhythmical and musical phonetic structure: "Daydreams and Nightdreams", "Days and Nights", "Waking Dream". The list of stories in the collection *Eight Men* reads like a contemporary poem:

The Man Who Was Almost a Man
The Man Who Lived Underground
Big Black Good Man
The Man Who Saw The Flood
Man of All Work
Man, God Ain't Like That
The Man Who Killed a Shadow
The Man Who Went to Chicago

Metaphors and symbols, both the naive sort we find in fairy tales and the complex, multi-semantic sort that

characterize the most sophisticated contemporary expressionists and surrealists, are constituent elements of Wright's prose.

The novel about Bigger Thomas begins with the killing of a rat. The nameless hero who lives underground begins his life there in a duel with a rat. The hero of *The Long Dream* begins his new post-prison life by killing a wounded mangy dog. The killing of animals anticipates the violence perpetrated by man against man. In the first story of Wright's first book the close presence of a white woman dooms three black youths and transforms their comrade into a murderer and a rebel. Closeness to a white woman makes a murderer and rebel of Bigger Thomas, though it also allows him to know freedom and to find himself. The accusation of murdering a white woman drives a black man underground, which becomes his vantage point in looking at the world. Intimacy with a white woman leads a young black to his death and provokes a pogrom—the first terrible experience of the hero in *The Long Dream*—and subsequently the approach of a white prostitute almost leads to his own death. The evil lasciviousness of a white woman makes a gentle black man commit murder ("The Man Who Killed a Shadow"). A black who wants only to be an "outsider" develops an intimate relationship with a white woman, which killed them both. And in the fantastic parody called "Man, God Ain't Like That" the situation is twice turned inside out: a white woman is accused of murdering a white artist whom actually knifed a black man, who in turn supposes that he is killing a new Christ in order that He might rise again and bring happiness to black Africa.

The black man who assaults a white woman is a symbolic, almost ritual personification of a terrifying myth and at the same time a naturalistic stereotype for racial antagonism and propaganda. In Wright's work this situation acquires new and broader significance: we see here a mythological symbol embodied in naturalistically and authentically recreated situations. Wright does not enter into a direct and open polemic with the prejudice implant-

ed in the consciousness of many Americans. Nor does he avoid dealing with this prejudice, pass over it in silence, or set it in contrast to pious and idealized images of heroic, kind, divinely chaste black angels. No, he takes the path of greatest resistance; he does not camouflage the sore, but opens it up, squeezing out the pus and blood. Nor does he direct his words at a select audience, at sophisticated intellectuals capable of thinking in dialectical terms and objectively examining the complex web of social, biological and psychological factors; rather his words are addressed to the broadest possible audience. His novels are closer in genre to the detective story than to anything else (which is nothing unusual, considering that *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are also constructed like detective stories). What could be more readable than a dramatic adventurous novel full of chase scenes, murders and police investigations, topped off by racy black slang, dynamic scenes of violence and erotic adventures?! From the very start these novels and stories are capable of attracting the most undemanding, unthinking reader, the kind who turns to books, as he would to the movies or television, in search of an elegant, make-believe life, a pleasant daydream to distract and divert him from repellent reality. But Wright's books, stunning, gripping, tantalizing and exasperating as they are, in fact immerse the reader in the most complex and terrible problems of that reality which he seeks to escape.

3. NEW WORLDS

The first black writers in the United States appeared in the 19th century. Their works were far more likely to be social—political and didactic—than artistic in nature. Some of the first black American writers like Frederic Douglas occupied a prominent place in the history of American social thought. Genuinely artistic, poetic works dealing with the drama and tragedy of life as experi-

enced by the American black were written by such white writers as Harriet Beecher-Stowe, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and Herman Melville. The lyrics and prose of "colored" authors at this time differed from that of white authors primarily in thematics and, in isolated cases, the quantitative predominance of black folklore and dialect. But in terms of their general world outlook, their basic use of language, style and all the expressive means employed in literature, they were an organic part of the common stream of American *belles lettres*. The black writers who either voluntarily or involuntarily strove for "assimilation" in order to merge with the main stream of American literature embodied the hopes, ideals and aspirations of those of their black brothers who believed in the organic unity of the American nation, which they believed was capable of productively assimilating and fusing the most varied ethnic, racial and national elements; but already in the twenties the art and literature of the "Negro Renaissance" made their appearance. The extraordinary success of indigenous black music, which in many ways affected the development of American and European art after the First World War, the ever increasing popularity of black folklore in various countries, the clear influence of African art in Western Europe and America, already apparent at the end of the 19th century, the rapid growth in the number of black intellectuals in the United States and the still more rapid growth of black industrial workers and the black population of Northern cities—all these factors were reflected in poetry and prose and nonfiction. Above all the "new" blacks discovered and proudly affirmed their ethnic difference and uniqueness. The writers of this period, who as a group are also referred to as the "Harlem Renaissance", no longer dreamed simply of merging with America's white culture; feeling themselves an organic part of this culture, they simultaneously began to recognize and value their own authenticity. The poetry of Langston Hughes was perhaps the most significant literary development of this period.

The works of Richard Wright signified a turning point, a transition from the peaceful "Negro Renaissance" to a period of rebellion and revolution. Melvin Tolson heralded the birth of this new epoch in his poem "Dark Symphonie":

The New Negro

Breaks the icons of his detractors,

Wipes out the conspiracy of silence,

Speaks to his America:

"My history-moulding ancestors

Planted the first crops of wheat on these shores,

Built ships to conquer the seven seas,

Erected the Cotton Empire,

Flung railroads across a hemisphere,

Disemboweled the earth's iron and coal,

Tunneled the mountains and bridged rivers,

Harvested the grain and hewed forests. . .

Fought a hundred battles for the Republic."

The New Negro:

His giant hands fling murals upon high chambers,

His drama teaches a world to laugh and weep,

His voice thunders the Brotherhood of Labor,

His science creates seven wonders,

His Republic of Letters challenges the Negro-

baiters.¹¹

Wright was the first literary spokesman for this Republic of Letters. In his prose the American black first began to speak with his whole voice, his own special language; he did not use his new voice to call for pity or mercy, or justice, nor to prove that he was in no way worse than his white compatriots, that he was just as much a Christian and an American. No, he used his new voice to affirm his difference and even his opposition; he tore off the masks and covers with which his kind friends and Uncle Tom's patrons had adorned him, tore off the bandages with their soothing balm designed to heal his wounds. With his hands, covered with the grime of work,

with blood as well, he wiped off the make-up which was supposed to soften his appearance, distorted as it was with pain, fear and hatred. And wiping out the "conspiracy of silence", he proclaimed to his step-motherland, "...America had kept us locked in the dark underworld of American life for three hundred years—and we had made our own code of ethics, values, loyalty."¹²

Wright grew up during the Great Depression, and he became a communist because he hoped that a proletarian revolution, in destroying the capitalist order, would also destroy racial discrimination and national hostility toward the blacks, and that all Americans, regardless of their national origin or the color of their skin, would merge together in a single nation and people.

But the crisis came to an end, political events took a different turn than Wright and his comrades had expected, racial discrimination did not abate. And though the United States battled against European fascism, whose standard was militant racism, and though blacks became officers and professors and politicians, it became all the more evident that black workers and soldiers were still *black*, were creatures of a different sort than their white colleagues, friends or subordinates. The blood used in administering transfusions to the wounded was still segregated: "white" blood was kept separate from "black" blood. The deliberate, even exalted "Negrophilism" of some white liberals and radicals only underscored the alienation of blacks, often no less keenly than blatant racism.

Again and again Wright had to acknowledge the illu-soriness and sketchiness of many of his theoretical speculations and ideas: the individualism of the artist, searching, wandering, rushing about in the labyrinths of the inexplicable, in the chaos of ever new disappointments and doubts and tragically unresolved conflicts shaking the world during the cold war years and the McCarthy period, in the fever of reports of new wars, class and racial battles, and the unrelieved suffering of people on all continents. During this period Wright the artist more and

more often retreated before Wright the publicist, sociologist, philosopher, and spokesman for political causes. Retreated and regressed.

"The stories that were written in France after he left America do not begin to compare with the stories . . . which he wrote here in the States. . . . France liberated him as a person . . . but I don't think France was good for him as an artist."¹³ So wrote one of Wright's long-time friends, the critic Saunders Y. Redding, several years after the writer's death. Wright died in Paris in 1960, almost forgotten (or so it seemed) in his native land.

Declining to participate actively in social life, Wright did not begin to write more prolifically or freely, nor did the quality of his work improve. On the contrary, in his safe and comfortable isolation, far from his native land, from former friends and comrades, he seemed to have cut himself off from one of the vital sources of his creativity. Even his most sympathetic critics acknowledged that the essays and novels he wrote in emigration are considerably inferior to his stories of the thirties and forties and *Native Son*.

* * *

In discovering the world of raging, frenzied rebels around him and in recreating that world in his books, Wright firmly rejected the meekness of Uncle Tom, his ideals of Christian gentleness. His first book was openly polemical. The "children" of Uncle Tom attracted the artist above all by virtue of those features which distinguished them from their "father"—mild-tempered, submissive to fate, closely bound to his friends, his "neighbors", who are also uncomplaining slaves, and from whom he differs only in his selfless kindness and his unshakeable, though unobtrusive, courage in defense of moral laws. But the new generation of American blacks, the literary "children" of Bigger Thomas, rejected him just as firmly as he had rejected his "father". James

Baldwin, one of the most talented contemporary American writers, a black man who is constantly and agonizingly concerned with the fate of his people while retaining his broad American identity, clashed both with Beecher-Stowe and with Wright, his immediate predecessor, in the name of the newest, strictly individualistic principles of freedom. He was convinced that Uncle Tom and Bigger Thomas were of the same mold, for each of them feared himself, feared to be alone, and thus eschewed the highest form of rebellion—the revolt of the totally independent personality.

Wright also influenced Ralph Ellison. The very plot of his novel *Invisible Man* is an obvious echo of Wright's story "The Man Who Lived Underground". Ellison's novel affirms the rebellion of the individual to an even greater degree than Baldwin's publicistic utterances. Wright's disciples and heirs polemically distanced themselves from him. But in time many of these writers—Baldwin especially—recognized their affinity with Wright and began to accept ideas they had previously regarded as sociological illusions, as the "naive ideals of collectivism". The events of the 60s in the United States which came to be termed "the Black Revolution" prompted Baldwin and many other black poets and novelists to take a new look at the world and themselves in that world. And then the real legacy of Richard Wright, the prophetic and tragic aspect of his quests and confusion, made itself felt more clearly. During the second half of the 60s people began talking about him again. And they continued to talk, and write, and argue; research papers, reminiscences, dissertations, and literary portraits of the "prophet of the Black Revolution" were being published. Ecstatic panegyrists quarrelled with scornful sceptics; black nationalists argued against the advocates of an integrated "black and white" American culture and against the champions of international humanism.

"Wright is a mediocre novelist, and mediocre in a fundamental sense: he does not inform his experience

with a meaning deeper than their representational value,"¹⁴ writes the critic Theodore Gross.

"Wright has been forced to win as a Negro who happened to be a writer the recognition that he desired as a writer who happened to be a Negro. . . . Wright told us more about what it meant to be an artist in an insensitive world than what it meant to be a Negro," writes the critic Warren French, who viewed Wright as a unique "black double" of John Steinbeck, and *Native Son* as "the Negro equivalent of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*".¹⁵

In his book *The Example of Richard Wright* the novelist Dan McCall affirmed that "Wright explored the American mind with the equipment America had forced him to bear in this. His work is an example of what Sartre defined as genius—'not a gift but the way out that one invents in desperate cases'".¹⁶

"...Wright had an extraordinary talent for the reporting of events that allowed the reader to reconstruct them kinesthetically, but . . . had little ability to maintain stylistic consistency in his work when he began to present purely intellectual arguments,"¹⁷ demonstrated the critic Edward Margolies.

The new historical dimensions and the new, ever increasing importance of Wright, his literary creations, thoughts and doubts became ever more evident in the wide-ranging diversity of opinions expressed in these historical, literary and sociological discussions. And this was borne out with incommensurably greater force by real events: in the hot summer of 1965 and succeeding summers riots broke out in the black ghettos and hundreds of thousands of Bigger Thomases took to the streets crying "Black Power!" and "Burn, Baby, Burn!"

But both thanks to and despite these new confirmations of the concrete, prophetic truth of Wright's utterances as artist of the "Black Revolution", we gradually come to see still other features of his work whose significance is felt beyond the confines of purely black or purely American problems.

“The Negro is America’s metaphor,” said Wright.

The blacks who were cast on the shores of America from a distant and completely different continent became an integral, though keenly isolated, and unique part of the multi-racial American nation: they are both the victims and the creators of its history and culture. The life of the American black unites cruel slavery with the desire for freedom; a longing after the noblest ideals with a base existence disfigured by vice and crime; the gentle traditions of a rural, patriarchal life with the incurable illness of urban industrial civilization; courageous, dynamic creative energy as personified by Wright’s own life with the sullen baseness and inhumanity of Bigger Thomas’ self-affirmation.

In all these ways the life of the black man in America anticipates and metaphorically personifies the global fate of America, birthplace of the American Dream and the atom bomb, the melting pot of races, tribes and nations and the hotbed of Jim Crowism, a land of democratic freedoms and buoyant individualism which is justly proud of its Declaration of Independence affirming individual rights, down to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”, and at the same time a country of powerful money-grubbers, self-seeking politicians, and depersonalizing, dehumanizing standardization on the most massive scale, the continuously expanding production of standard ideas, fashions, amusements, standard virtues and standard vices.

But this America is not simply inseparable from other countries, not simply bound to them in countless vital ties; it also provides the world with sustenance through its material and spiritual energy. Yet at the same time it is quite cut off from other countries and continents.

Is not the contemporary role of America in the world similar to the role that blacks play in her own life? To the seething, contradictory thoughts and passions which arise when the chauvinism of the Black Muslims and the Black Panthers clashes with the enlightened Christian humanism of Martin Luther King’s followers, and on the

other hand with "Negro Negrophobia"? Is not America's role similar to everything that Wright first foresaw and revealed with such primeval strength?

The sources and subjects of Wright's work are extremely concrete—in conception, in imagery and in language. This is the prose of an American black, a wanderer, a proletarian, a self-taught intellectual who was the disciple of Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Dostoyevsky and Joyce, who studied American sociologists and Marx, Freud and Heidegger and joined philosophical ranks with Camus and Sartre, whose first novel earned the approval of Faulkner, a man chary of praise. But this extreme concreteness—historical, social, ethnic, literary and aesthetic—generated those forces which gave Wright's books, especially his fictional works, a long-lasting and international influence which only now, many years after his death, is being recognized. Today we see that Wright's works not only anticipated those terrible problems of black America which only recently have come to the forefront of attention and will retain their urgency for some time to come; we also see how the new self-consciousness of the peoples of black Africa gives rise to problems fraught with the dangers of collision. "Negritude" is a form of black racism which is beginning to worry both the young African states and the world as a whole.

The severe, defiant, exasperating truth proclaimed by Wright the artist continues ever more surely to surmount racial barriers. In describing the deformities of urban capitalistic civilization he reveals threats and dangers which continue to plague men of different races and different historical periods.

NOTES

¹ Richard Wright, *Native Son*, N.Y. & Lnd., 1940, p. 140.

² *Ibid.*, p. 358.

³ M. Bakhtin, *Problemy poetiki Dostoyevskogo*, Moscow, 1972, pp. 8-9 (in Russian).

- ⁴ Richard Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground" in: *Eight Men*, N.Y., 1961, p. 33.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 38.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 80.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 86.
- ⁸ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, N.Y., 1954, Dedication.
- ⁹ Richard Wright, *Eight Men*, pp. 212-13, 215.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 66.
- ¹¹ *The Black American Writer*, Vol. I, Baltimore, 1971, p. 13.
- ¹² Richard Wright, *Eight Men*, p. 250.
- ¹³ *Anger and Beyond: The Negro Writer in the United States*, N.Y., 1966, p. 206.
- ¹⁴ *The Black American Writer*, Vol. I, pp. 56-57.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 125, 141, 127.
- ¹⁶ Dan McCall, *The Example of Richard Wright*, N.Y., 1969, p. 195.
- ¹⁷ *The Black American Writer*, Vol. I, p. 137.

M. MENDELSON

**FROM *THE GRAPES OF WRATH* TO
*THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT****

It can be asserted without the slightest hesitation that while quite a few American critics do not regard John Steinbeck's work very highly—to put it rather mildly—the Soviet reader regards this author as one of the most significant American novelists of this century. His best works are not only popular—connoisseurs of art are convinced that John Steinbeck ranks among such master American prosaists as Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe.

There is hardly a critic in the Soviet Union who would deny that Steinbeck possessed a great literary talent indeed. Countless images of human beings created by him have entered into the consciousness of readers not only in the United States and the Soviet Union, but—it must be added—in many other lands throughout the world.

This is not to imply that our people (or I, for instance, as a critic) value everything that this highly prolific artist ever wrote. Certainly there are exceptions, and quite a few, to be sure. Not all of Steinbeck's published novels, short stories, essays, statements to the press strike us as warranted, profound, or aesthetically satisfactory. Some of his books do not please at all. Many of Steinbeck's interviews (particularly those, I am extremely pained to say, that appeared in the last years of his life) distress the sincere admirers of his truly formidable talent.

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Nevertheless one would like, naturally enough, to pay particular attention to his best works. In my opinion—and I hope some of those who come across these lines see eye to eye with me—Steinbeck's greatest novels are *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*. It goes without saying that he has written many other outstanding tales—long and short—among them *The Pastures of Heaven*, the cycle of stories *The Red Pony*, the novels *Tortilla Flat*, *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*. We cannot help but note, however, that while Steinbeck's creative life in its first decade, culminating in *The Grapes of Wrath*, continually advanced on the whole, later it became much more complicated and in many respects surprisingly contradictory.

Here I shall attempt to characterize briefly Steinbeck's literary career from *The Grapes of Wrath* to *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

Upon publication in 1939 of *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck was immediately assigned a place of honor among contemporary American prose writers. True, a number of professional critics and men of politics as well publicly and rather vehemently denounced this novel as no more than a lengthy piece of propaganda. But millions upon millions of readers were shaken to the depths of their souls by the tale of the heart-rending experiences of the Joads. They sensed the remarkable reality of the characters, which, being true to both art and life, continued to move them long after the book was put aside.

Shortly before Steinbeck completed his masterpiece, he released a small volume entitled *Their Blood Is Strong* (1938). That book documented the tragic fate of farm laborers, men and women who had earlier owned land and houses and had to migrate to California during the thirties desperately seeking work. Everything in the book *Their Blood Is Strong* confirmed the veracity of events later portrayed in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The people, says Steinbeck in *Their Blood Is Strong*, who made the arduous journey to California were plagued

by one urgent necessity: "to find work at any wage in order that the family may eat". Although migrant workers were badly needed, they were hated by the local inhabitants. The dirty mattresses strapped to the wandering laborers' automobiles, their frying pans, blackened over many roadside campfires, and their unwashed bodies did not promise good relations with the prosperous Californians. But the newcomers' job prospects depended upon well-to-do farmers.

In the small book, designed to prepare the reader for *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck was well aware of the objections his forthcoming novel could occasion), the author relates his personal impressions of the California camps where migrant agricultural workers languish in tents and in shanties made of cardboard and flattened tin cans.

Even in those families regarded as fortunate, more or less "well-to-do", women washed linen in dirty water without soap. Every face registered horror of the days to come and the prospect of starvation. In one tent, a family of six huddled together. The father, mother and their four children all slept in one bed. They told Steinbeck that one baby had died quite recently. The reason was perfectly obvious: he had no milk for months.

In the book *Their Blood Is Strong* the writer is not only speaking of what he had seen with his own eyes. He also cites sociological and economic studies on the subject. The groups of wealthier and more powerful planters dictated what policy the smaller farmers should take toward migrant workers. This state of affairs could not have been possible without what Steinbeck calls a system of terrorism "that would be unusual in the Fascist nations of the world".¹

Still the author fervently believed in the people. It is for this reason that he entitled his book: *Their Blood Is Strong*.

For the author of the epic *The Grapes of Wrath* to tell the story of the trials of the "Okies" in *Their Blood Is Strong* was a sort of public testimony. The reader was

shown, in fact, was made to believe fully, that everything described in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the agonizing conditions under which the Joads were forced to live, the almost fantastic events of their everyday existence, no matter how horrible they may seem, were true to life, were distinguished by unimpeachable veracity.

But *The Grapes of Wrath* is not merely a chronicle of the sufferings experienced in California by farmers who had been driven from their native lands. There is an element in Steinbeck's novel which was not documented in the publication preceding it. In fact it could not be verified in this manner, although it seems that precisely this more than anything else determined the book's greatness. This aspect of *The Grapes of Wrath* concerns more than the migrant farmers from Oklahoma and their conflict with the California planters. Steinbeck here deals with a potential, inevitable struggle. One could sense in *The Grapes of Wrath* a reflection of a general conflict between the lower classes of America and its wealthy citizens.

One must also bear in mind that *The Grapes of Wrath* gave expression to the ideal of *collectivism* which found many followers in the United States during the thirties. And I refer not only to the people involved in agriculture.

It is undoubtedly true that the principles of scientific socialism remained alien to Steinbeck all his life. But the remarkable artistic intuition of Steinbeck, the intuition of an author who was very close to the simple Americans helped him to divine a great deal. So subtly and acutely was Steinbeck able to sense some of the most significant aspects of the life of common people in America of the thirties, that he managed to incarnate those years into images of staggering power. The creator of *The Grapes of Wrath* compelled many Americans born when the thirties had already become history, to acknowledge the full magnitude of the philosophy of the American life as depicted in the novel. It is obvious, I believe, that *The Grapes of Wrath* is superior to

all of Steinbeck's preceding books (and, it should be added, to his later works, too). The writer did manifest even before the appearance of *The Grapes of Wrath* a persistent interest in depicting Americans who had no passion for ownership. He repeatedly tried to show that only freedom from the desire to accumulate property could bring happiness. But in *The Grapes of Wrath* he portrayed for the first time an attraction for collectivism as a feature which became important to quite many of his countrymen.

Unfortunately one cannot dismiss one aspect of Steinbeck's character which is highly regrettable, but made itself felt time and again. The writer was rather unstable ideologically. One can hardly name, I think, another American author of similar magnitude whose work underwent so startling a transformation in such a short span of time as was the case with the author of *The Grapes of Wrath* at the time the thirties turned into forties.

Very soon after the appearance of *The Grapes of Wrath* John Steinbeck fell into a state of ideological confusion, even spiritual prostration. Those facts of American life which for him were the foundation of his famous book suddenly seemed to lose their reality. As a result of the Second World War, which had just broken out in Europe, the curse of mass unemployment which for a full decade determined the destinies of millions of Americans suddenly seemed no longer to oppress them. What is more, the involved European countries' growing demand for commodities resulted in a shortage of seasonal workers on the California plantations (a major part was also played in this by the forced exile of many Japanese-Americans from the state).

It goes without saying that this did not annihilate the gap between the world of the Joads and that of their exploiters. Thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of readers continued to sense this even during the Second World War. But the author of *The Grapes of Wrath* evidently experienced profound uncertainty.

One might add that the grave problem of the Joads, even if one viewed it in the more narrow sense as a problem of laborers in American agriculture, exists even today and finds reflection in serious, often extremely bitter, struggle between seasonal help and the employers.

In his collection of documentary materials on the themes of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the literary historian Warren French confirmed that in 1960, for instance, the problem of migrant workers was still a harsh reality in the United States and that the life of these people was extremely difficult. According to French, union officials confirmed that the same California planters who so pitilessly dealt with the Joads in the thirties, are attempting even today to lower the wages of their employees.

One cannot argue with such facts. But during the Second World War some, perhaps, even many of the "Joads" ceased to do seasonal labor and found better-paying occupations in industry. As a result, Steinbeck seems to have concluded, that the factual basis of his novel had, if not totally disappeared, then at least been substantially shaken.

However strange it may seem, this writer who had so keenly reacted against the inhuman activities of the California planters so close in their display to fascism, appeared, at least at first, unable to comprehend the threat of fascism on an international scale. Here one senses a certain provincialism in Steinbeck's ideological perspective. Hitler's war was for some time interpreted by the author as evidence of supposedly universal human thirst for the destruction of one's fellow men.

In the spring of 1940, Steinbeck together with his friend, the biologist Edward Ricketts, went to Mexico. The war in Western Europe began to inspire growing anxiety in the writer. In the book *The Sea of Cortez* written in collaboration with Edward F. Ricketts as a result of this journey and published some time later, he does not hide his sincere desire to retreat from reality, which had just recently occupied his entire thoughts. The

necessity of terminating his journey to a land ostensibly distant from grave contemporary problems seemed to disturb and perhaps frighten him.

The artist became more and more certain of the justification of what he called "non-teleological thinking", which avoids the question "why?" in favor of stating merely: "what" and "how". Steinbeck, of course, did not become a totally different person. Recalling his meetings with Mexicans, he was still able to speak warmly of their humanism, contrasting this to the possessive instincts of supposedly more civilized nations. Nevertheless he is now concerned largely with treating man as a purely biological entity.

In a world governed by animal law alone, there is neither guilt nor innocence. "In such a world," writes Joseph Fontenrose in his book *John Steinbeck*, "blame is out of the question; we cannot even speak of causes, because everything is just what it is. . . ." ²

How distant such a world view was from the tenor of *The Grapes of Wrath*! Fontenrose's demonstrating of the essence of "non-teleological thinking" only accents the discrepancy between the theme of Steinbeck's best novel and that concept of life which he came to espouse so shortly after its completion.

However I must say that Fontenrose is mistaken when he assures the reader that the ideas expressed in *The Sea of Cortez* "although receiving complete articulation and formulation here for the first time, underlie all Steinbeck's novels of the thirties. . . ." ³ On the contrary, one can trace through various works of the thirties the development of those ideas of the writer which culminated in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The American critic is correct, however, when finding evidence of clearly expressed social Darwinism in *The Sea of Cortez*. By way of evidence one can refer not only to Steinbeck's conclusions that unemployment is unavoidable, but to his idea that war is inherent in human nature and therefore likewise inevitable, while collectivist principles are supposedly dangerous.

Regrettably Fontenrose does not succeed in demonstrating with sufficient clarity how sharply the part of *The Sea of Cortez* written by Steinbeck differs from *The Grapes of Wrath*. The difference, of course, is profound and basic.

Steinbeck remained a highly contradictory writer throughout practically the remainder of his life. Of course, he retained much of his love for people, his great creative gift and also his desire to show true life in all its multiplicity. Even later he continued to write books which showed a penetrating grasp of reality and which deserved very high aesthetic approbation (the best example is the novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*). But in the last two decades of his sixty-odd years (Steinbeck died at about the same age as Hemingway and Faulkner) there were some periods of pronounced creative stagnation, when agonizing work yielded result which could hardly be called very successful. In addition, political immaturity, to put it mildly, revealed in his evaluation of the Vietnam war, also cast a shadow on the writer's reputation.

Steinbeck's great misfortune was that he lacked the inner strength to retain to the full—after the novel of the Joads was completed—his identity as a keen observer of life and creative writer. He was unable to preserve his spiritual integrity in the face of one of the most crucial moments in the history of contemporary man, on the very eve of the Soviet Union's and subsequently of his own country's entrance into the struggle against Hitler's hordes. For it was at precisely that time that Steinbeck's difficulties as an author began. These were not, however, lost years, devoid of any value. While in most of Steinbeck's books of the forties and fifties there is not very much of his former aesthetic merits, even during these two decades he emerges at times as a great master.

We will not dwell on Steinbeck's wartime works. Let us only note that in the book *Bombs Away* one feels how distant the writer was from a clear notion of the nature

of the war. He fails to comprehend the tragedy implicit in the fact that quite a number of American youths remained fairly indifferent to the cause for which they donned their uniforms.

Of far greater significance than the two tales (one later turned into a play) published by Steinbeck during the war, was the collection of his wartime reportage put together and printed much later, at the end of the fifties. The value of this book lies in its clearly felt general opposition to war, to militarism. Steinbeck does not dwell at any length on the causes and nature of the Second World War. The author's purpose here is to remind his readers during the "cold" war about the horrors of "hot" war, to warn that such bloodthirsty madness must not be repeated.

The Soviet reader cannot help being struck by the fact that quite a few American writers seemed blind to the content of the struggle against fascist Germany.

Therefore one hardly should be surprised that while decisive battles were still being fought on many fronts, battles that meant the loss of tremendous numbers of lives, Steinbeck wrote his novel *Cannery Row* which, as he explains, was designed to allow the reader to forget for a time about the war which was beginning to get on their nerves.

Steinbeck's tale *Tortilla Flat*, depicting a tiny fantastic world where unselfish people, in contrast to the surrounding property-minded society, own no possessions and are ready to come to the aid of all those in need, appeared in the thirties. These benevolent eccentrics became the heroes of a kind of a comic fairy tale. *Cannery Row* might at first glance seem to be a new variant on the theme of *Tortilla Flat*. But in his depictions of anarchistic-minded men and sentimental prostitutes, the writer, while appearing to condemn the world of notorious bourgeois, in fact repeatedly extolls egocentricity. While the anti-bourgeois romanticism of the tale *Tortilla Flat* represented one of the stages in the author's development towards *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Cannery Row* con-

tains elements of Steinbeck's polemic with his own epoch-making work.

There are, in my opinion, some modernistic tendencies in the newer novel. One senses similar motifs, for instance, in *Cannery Row* and in Kerouac's *On the Road* (although probably neither Steinbeck nor Kerouac suspected this).

Steinbeck's talent, however, was too great and his hatred of greed too organic for him to confine his output to works possessing obviously weak points, even in those difficult years separating *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

During the year when *Cannery Row* was published he composed an extended short story *The Pearl* (which two years later appeared in book form). Certain critics viewed *The Pearl* only as a manifestation of the writer's penchant for poeticizing primitive cultures. But here the writer, it seems to me, is expressing his hatred for the bourgeois world in no uncertain terms.

One of his most contradictory works was the novel *The Wayward Bus*, which appeared in 1947, a complex and difficult time for the writer. The critic Peter Lisca considers this the last novel which still reflected Steinbeck's life in California, before his move to New York. At that time, according to Lisca, he still was subject to the benevolent influence of simple people.

But it seems to me that *The Wayward Bus* manifests rather the influence of a crisis that had been developing in Steinbeck's works ever since the completion of *The Grapes of Wrath*. And the author's move from California to New York hardly has much to do with this crisis. *The Sea of Cortez* was after all composed while the writer was still living in California. On the other hand, Steinbeck's excellent *The Winter of Our Discontent* was produced after the author had been away from California for a good many years.

The Wayward Bus is another one of Steinbeck's "fables", although perhaps quite a bit more expansive than the writer's earlier efforts. The passengers, obviously enough, represent a microcosm of America. The

most prominent among them is the businessman Pritchard. His image is basically a negative one. Like Babbitt, he has no spiritual life nor needs any. At times it seems that Steinbeck is imitating Sinclair Lewis' most famous creation when he characterizes Pritchard not as an individual, but as merely a unit in business, in church, in a political party, in his club. He shows Pritchard's hatred for all that is foreign, be it a country or a single individual.

Pritchard is even more of a nonentity than Babbitt. Lewis' hero could at one time experience something resembling love. He longed to be close to a woman. Pritchard is simply a vile person.

But at the end of the novel he unexpectedly appears as a man transformed, imbued with positive principles. He works together with the other passengers to the limits of his strength, so that the "wayward bus" can continue on its way. This eleventh-hour redemption cannot be attributed to the author's well-considered intention to show the complexities of Pritchard's character. One has the impression that such a "happy ending" arises out of a great writer's unhappy reluctance to submit to the logic of his own book, out of his unfortunate readiness to follow when writing his story in the footsteps of the literary conformists.

There is one other important feature of this novel which could not be called a positive one. The driver Juan, a good man in many respects, is set in contrast to Pritchard. An apparently honest, kind-hearted person, Juan resolves to change his life in a significant way. That is why he plans to abandon this bus where so many unpleasant and disgusting people are gathered. In the end, however, he gives up this notion. A fleeting "romance" with Pritchard's daughter deprives Juan of his moral superiority to his passengers, and convinces him that things should be left as they are. Led by the driver, the characters work together. But the goal of their labor is to continue an essentially meaningless journey.

The reader is disturbed by the implication arising in *The Wayward Bus* that in the end all men are equally bad, that there are neither guilty nor innocent people. Critics saw the novel's ending as an indication that the writer was prepared to take a "positive" stand. In fact this was nothing else but the moral nihilism that Steinbeck attempted to justify in *The Sea of Cortez*.

Toward the end of the forties a great number of highly critical statements about Steinbeck's work began to appear in the American press. In many cases these were justified. In 1950, for instance, the author felt a need to defend himself, with great bitterness, against his opponents.

The critics create the impression that "starting nowhere I have consistently gone down",⁴ exclaimed the writer in one article published in the *Saturday Review of Literature*. He was particularly indignant at the reviews of his plays which, not without foundation, were unfavorable. Steinbeck ended his article with the melancholy observation that he had not lost hope of publishing books which would sell enough copies so that he "may eat and continue to have fun".⁵

Steinbeck's longest novel, *East of Eden* (1952), is partly based on the story of the author's own family. The portrait of his grandfather (Samuel Hamilton), a man whose indestructible humanity was so dear to Steinbeck, is particularly well executed. Humaneness for Hamilton was a much more powerful motive than the desire for ready cash was for so many Americans. The natural beauties of California are sketched by the author in delicate, true colors.

In my view, *East of Eden* is, however, basically an unsuccessful work. Steinbeck devoted his energies to creating what he thought would be a serious book. But the biblical analogies are forced, the plot artificial, and the treatment of good and evil hangs in the air. It is a novel with very weak foundations.

The Grapes of Wrath was composed during the high point of social consciousness in America, while the works

of the early fifties were clearly affected by a characteristic decline in American social awareness. (This tendency showed its worth later as well.)

There is quite an extensive body of American literary commentary on *East of Eden*. At times the critics rather smugly note that in this book Steinbeck abandoned his social concerns of the thirties and instead turned to exclusively moral problems. But it is impossible to overlook the fact that Steinbeck was also concerned with moral questions when he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*. In *East of Eden* we are dealing with another phenomenon. The author is approaching moral questions from an abstract point of view. At times the motives of evil and good can be perceived as having a vague connection to real life, but largely they are utterly divorced from reality.

It is hardly even worth examining such Steinbeck's books of the fifties, as *Burning Bright* and *Sweet Thursday*. Although there is plenty of moral sententiousness here, one cannot really claim that the author is handling serious themes. An attempt was made to create an operetta based on *Sweet Thursday*, and indeed one senses a cheap, ready-made commercial humor in the novel.

However in the second half of the fifties when McCarthyism began to lose its force, and particularly toward the end of the decade, Steinbeck's work assumed a new aspect. He was more and more disturbed by the prospect of nuclear war and at the same time began to take a much more critical view of moral degradation in his native land, than at any time since the writing of *The Grapes of Wrath*. This is evident even in such a tale as *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* (1957), which at first sight appears rather frivolous. It is worthy of note that Steinbeck depicts a hero who, although he is a king, is prevented from championing the most humble of bourgeois-democratic reforms.

But even before the appearance of this story Steinbeck published a satirical essay, directed against McCar-

thyites. In addition, a series of his literary pieces warned of the dangers of a third world war. One of Steinbeck's sarcastic essays is particularly curious. The writer speaks of children taking a lively interest in space travel. And he implies that they express a desire to go to other planets because the inhabitants of earth are incapable of following any wise rules of communal life. They pillage the planet and, having learned to split the atom, may destroy all of mankind.

It was at that particular time that the writer evinced a desire to publish his war correspondence in book form. In the preface, Steinbeck warns that one more world war might be the last war of any kind on our planet.

In 1956, a story by Steinbeck appeared which later formed the basis for his novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*. The main problem for America of our time, according to the writer, was indeed the problem of morality. But Steinbeck no longer confines himself to abstractions. He speaks of moral corruption and its penetration into a world that is quite real and very close to him. It is evident that he knows it well.

Steinbeck was one of the first writers in the United States to divine that the post-war economic boom entailed many aspects of moral degradation, and that this phenomenon presented a threat to the country's well-being no less terrible than the material deprivation of the thirties.

The Winter of Our Discontent, the last novel published in Steinbeck's lifetime, is a remarkable work, regrettably underestimated by many American critics. In announcing the decision to award Steinbeck the Nobel Prize, the committee chairman, it seems to me, was justified in basing that decision not only on the writer's pre-war books, but on this novel as well. And, I suppose it was *The Winter of Our Discontent* (along with *The Grapes of Wrath*) that inspired some American critics, among them Leslie Fiedler (in *Waiting for the End*, 1965) to protest this award. Needless to say, I have no sympathy whatsoever for this kind of position.

Steinbeck was right in viewing the novel as one of the high points of his artistic life. Some historians of literature in the United States persist in rather underestimating the scope of the book. They unfairly limit themselves to analyzing the moral decline of the major character and his children, although Steinbeck undoubtedly intended to emphasize the widespread symptoms of this plague. For both the head banker and the city fathers of the little town, where the action of the book takes place, at first glance so idyllic, are morally vulnerable and depraved.

The events revolving around Ethan Allen Hawley and his family represent—as was, no doubt, Steinbeck's intention—bourgeois society as a whole. Here we are presented not with those sections of the United States with which the author dealt in his earlier novels. Here is that part of the country, which supposedly possesses firm spiritual traditions. And it is most attractive from the outside. It is this America with her old small towns and beautiful little corners, which should incarnate the best qualities of life in the republic. But Steinbeck shows life there turned wrong-side out.

The novel is largely a satirical work painted in bright, exaggerated colors, inclined toward the grotesque. But many of its images are very subtly developed, the psychological relationships are often finely portrayed. Ethan Hawley plans to perpetrate a robbery, he performs a number of evil deeds. But he is no banal villain. Ethan has many remarkable human qualities. This gives rise to some duality and to what seems to be certain aesthetic contradictions in the novel. In the final analysis all this serves, however, to enrich the work artistically and to lend it greater scope and significance.

Hawley is descended from an impoverished, formerly wealthy family. Forced to work at an ill-paying job, he suffers for he cannot support his two children. Here is a thinking man. It would be unfair to say that moral principles are unimportant to him. But once he begins to comprehend how corrupt the "best" citizens of his

native town are, the hero (hesitating and suffering) resolves to strike it rich through a series of well-plotted dishonest designs.

We do not really know how successful Hawley's plans prove at the end. Steinbeck's main purpose is to show how pervasive corruption is. Hawley is most tormented by the discovery that his own son and daughter are also lost in moral nihilism. For the sake of money they are willing to do anything. The principal hero is horrified at the moral blind alley in which he finds himself and his family.

The Winter of Our Discontent was followed by the documentary tale *Travels with Charley in Search of America*. Some critics find the best passages of this book to be those where Steinbeck discourses on natural science, although in this respect his erudition is hardly distinguished. Perhaps there is far more value in the portrait of the black student, for instance, who so boldly wants to defend the interests of his people. Here the writer manifests a particularly keen comprehension of contemporary issues.

I must repeat that Steinbeck was not able to overcome completely even in the last years of his life those ideological contradictions that plagued him. But let us not forget that the magnitude of the artist's work is manifested above all in his novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*, and Steinbeck's creative gift must be assessed as great and enduring as any serious scholar of American literature must inevitably conclude.

NOTES

¹ *A Companion to THE GRAPES OF WRATH*, ed. by Warren French, N.Y., Viking Press, 1963, p. 69.

² Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck. An Introduction and Interpretation*, N.Y., 1964, p. 91.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴ *The Theory of the American Novel*, Edited with an Introduction by George Perkins, N.Y., 1970, p. 411.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 412.

III

A NEW QUEST*

Y. Kovalev, *Molodaya Amerika (Young America)*, Leningradsky Universitet Publishers, 1971, 118 pp.

Y. Kovalev, *German Melvill i amerikansky romantism (Herman Melville and American Romanticism)*, Khudozhestvennaya Literatura Publishers, 1972, 279 pp.

Russian writers have long been interested in the works of American romantics. We know that Pushkin followed developments in American literature, and that W. Küchelbeker, his friend and fellow student at the Lyceum and later a Decembrist, read Cooper's *The Pilot* while he was incarcerated in a fortress. Maxim Gorky wrote about Cooper's novels.

But the scholarly study of American romanticism in Russia lagged behind the growing popular interest in works of romantic literature. It was only during the Soviet period that literary critics began seriously to analyze the ideological and artistic features of romanticism, its ties to the social and political life of the period which in essence gave birth to a national American literature. The scientific interpretation of American romanticism based on the principles of Marxist-Leninist epistemology began in earnest at the beginning of the nineteen fifties, as evidenced by the works of M. P. Alekseyev, M. N. Bobrova, A. A. Elistratova, Y. N. Zasursky, M. O. Mendelson, A. S. Romm, A. K. Savurenok, R. M. Samarin, N. I. Samokhvalov, A. I. Startsev, V. N. Sheinker and

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other literary historians and critics. In the nineteen seventies Soviet "romantic" Americana was enriched by the works of Professor Y. V. Kovalev of Leningrad University. Among the characteristic features of his books are his fresh scholarly approach, his convincing argumentation and his masterly command of the language. An opponent in principle of formal, textual linguistic analysis, he concentrates on such problems as the intellectual and moral world of the artist in relation to the social life of the country and its history, the general tendencies at work in the spiritual life of the nation. As a result he arrives at a profound understanding of the creative process of the writer, his personality, and the influence of his works on the reading public.

The monograph *Young America* is one of those works which fills in gaps in our knowledge of the literary historical process of the romantic period. An important phenomenon in the social and literary "stream" of the times was the activity of a group called "Young America" which strove to affirm a democratic, national literature. This struggle was of great civic importance, though many contemporary scholars do not devote sufficient attention to it. In his monograph Kovalev rescues these "young Americans" from oblivion and restores the social, political and literary reputation that they deserve.

One of the principal tasks of the scholar in *Herman Melville and American Romanticism* is to demonstrate the groundlessness of the "lonely hero" concept which one so often encounters in the works of American and European critics of this great romantic. Herman Melville took an active part in the ideological and spiritual struggles of his times—that is the author's major premise.

"Typee", Melville's first story, is a romantic utopian work written in response to the social practice of bourgeois democracy. Kovalev establishes that Melville's participation in the activities of "Young America" convinced the writer that the political and civil rights of the people should be expanded. At the same time, as the author justly remarks, Melville did not share the optimism of

the "young Americans", who believed that contemporary society was inexorably moving forward. In examining Melville's spiritual and creative evolution, Kovalev organically resolves broader theoretical problems regarding the development of American romanticism such as its ties with Enlightenment ideals, for it was precisely during the period of the American Enlightenment that the system of moral principles was formed which were to become the foundation for American bourgeois democracy and its critical reinterpretation by the romantics. Kovalev carefully examines the social and historical causes of the troubles in society which the romantics became aware of in the course of the twenties, thirties and forties of the past century.

The author meticulously examines the specific features of Melville's mature work, his immortal novel *Moby Dick*, which is viewed above all as a social and philosophical work.

"The point of departure for his philosophical reflections," writes the author, "was his constant concern about America's destiny, his fears concerning a possible national tragedy." This is the point of view from which the scholar resolves the cardinal ethical problem of the novel: the duel between Good and Evil, the very concept of Evil and how it is conceived by the "raving giant" Ahab. Evil for him is a sort of unique projection-reflection of actual social evils. Kovalev comes to a remarkable conclusion as a result of his analytic reading of *Moby Dick*: Melville summed up the quests of the romantic mind and came to understand that the inhuman laws governing the abstract romantic "universe" were socially concrete, that they "worked from within" and were rooted in the very nature of the society he knew. Thus Melville in essence resolved the problems posed by the romantic interpretation of reality. His work is an example of how American literature found itself face to face with a new task: the critical examination of social mores, which American realists would take up. The increasingly critical attitude toward contemporary America is reflected in particular in Mel-

ville's later works—his story “Bartleby the Scrivener” and his historical novel *Israel Potter*. They add to our conception of Melville's evolution as a whole, though they lend a certain fragmentary quality to Kovalev's work and tend to distract the reader's attention, which is focused above all on Melville's best novel.

Nonetheless the hero of Kovalev's book is still, quite naturally, Herman Melville, the creator of *Moby Dick*, an artist who was able to hear the “voice” of the world and make his work relevant “for all seasons”, including the season of our lives today.

M. Tugusheva

FROM WHITMAN TO HEMINGWAY*

A. Startsev, *Ot Uitmena do Khemingueya (From Whitman to Hemingway)*, Moscow, Sovietsky Pisatel Publishers, 1972, 408 pp.

Two centuries constantly make themselves felt in A. Startsev's book. The twentieth century, with its tragic situations and conflicts, makes itself felt when the author speaks of the romantics. And the original tradition of the nineteenth century is present as something live and animated when the author speaks of the remarkable prosaists who made their appearance between the two world wars.

For this reason the book has an internal unity, though its essays work on various planes, from an extensive investigation of the short story to various polemical notes. We are presented with a graphic display of the lines of research which the author has followed in the past several years.

In his essay on Whitman the author speaks of the democratic ideal which lies at the heart of his poetry. During the Civil War the poet witnessed the soldier's burdens, sufferings and endurance; for Whitman this war marked a meeting of the real and the ideal. In 1876 he called it the "pivot" of his book of poems; and when bourgeois prose gave birth to bitter reflection, the exuberant intonations of "Song of Myself" gave way to completely different, often disquieting intonations in *Democratic Vistas*.

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Americans themselves have often written that the real course of things contradicted Whitman's poetic ideal, and Startsev quotes from a number of serious works published between the two world wars to illustrate this view. But there is another problem which has received far less attention: in these years which marked the flowering of American prose, how was the democratic tradition correlated with the ideological battles of our century? There is no dearth of critical works affirming that a genuinely poetic prose was created during these years only by those who kept their distance from these battles—F. Scott Fitzgerald seems to be a convincing example for these critics. But that simply is not so, and Startsev proves it. Whitman's America, the America of small railway stations bowing its head as Lincoln's coffin passed by, was always Fitzgerald's America. Once he had sensed anew his democratic roots, he spoke out strongly against America's illusions and self-deception, which had existed since frontier times. Striving to understand the mainspring driving the *haut monde* of the rich, Fitzgerald tried to grasp the meaning of *Capital* and wanted to present the hero of *Tender Is the Night*, a born idealist, as a man acquainted with the communist critique of capital. *Tender Is the Night* extends beyond its temporal framework and immediate theme: the reader, in Startsev's words, never ceases to feel that the subject at hand is the bourgeois world as a whole (as in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*); no wonder that Hemingway, upon rereading the novel in our times, found a tragic element in it, as well as the magic of art.

The uniqueness of America's literary development is one of the general themes running through all of Startsev's essays, just as the subject of the democratic tradition in American literature. In his examination of the short story Startsev describes how significant the national tradition of "grotesque humor" is for American literature; it even involves such romantics as Poe and Hawthorne, who are far removed from folklore. "Wild humor" takes on different meaning and import for such

twentieth century writers as Faulkner and Caldwell. In the generally tragic atmosphere of their books it has a countervailing effect and represents a response to somber contemporary experience: in some places it is traditional and folkloric, and in others it is reworked and reinterpreted.

Startsev has much to say about the fact that novels of the European type never took shape in nineteenth century American literature. But this fact is associated with a breakthrough toward historical truth in the genre of the short story, and that special role played by American romanticism in preparing for the universally acknowledged critical prose of the twentieth century. No wonder Thoreau and Melville are illuminated here as the forerunners of the twentieth century American novel.

And in fact the "dialogue" and closeness between writers of different periods is sometimes amazing. Thoreau illuminated the inner world of the personality which feels at home in nature and a stranger among those of its fellows which have been blinded by commercial interests; that is why his diaries meant so much to the masters of the social novel. The authors of *Sister Carrie* and *Babbitt* returned time and again to works by Thoreau.

Melville is just as deeply embedded in the American twentieth century. Startsev takes note of the professional exactitude and concreteness of description in both *Moby Dick* and *Walden*, qualities valued by later generations; he speaks about the overall meaning of Melville's tragic novel, which seems to grow richer as the time passes, about its ethical spirit, presaging Hemingway's *The Unde-feated*, about Ahab's obsession (we could find several characters in Faulkner who go to meet their fate as Ahab does). At the end of his essay the author speaks of the "multilayer" structure and style of *Moby Dick*, a quality which belongs as much to the romantic epoch as to the modern period. Faulkner had good reason to remark in his later years that he felt a close affinity to the style of

the novel and that Melville's shift from the "biblical" to the "gothic" seemed to him perfectly natural.

At times one can discover similarities between the very lives of nineteenth and twentieth century writers. Several writers now universally acclaimed were once consigned to oblivion by bourgeois civilization. Neither *Moby Dick* nor the works subsequently written by Melville earned him the sympathy of the reading public, and the great writer lived for decades as an obscure official. And when Fitzgerald went to work for Hollywood many of his contemporaries thought he was finished as a writer before his premature death, while, as A. Startsev claims, in the person of Fitzgerald American literature lost a prosaist who had not begun to exhaust his talent.

Startsev's essays on Hemingway deserve special attention. He wrote a penetrating piece on *Fiesta* when it first came out in Russian, and now he has taken up a problem which confronts Russian criticism in general: to re-evaluate Hemingway's creative life on the basis of a large body of new material now available, to revise conclusions about works that have long been familiar.

In his new essay on *Fiesta* the critic writes that it is, in certain respects, Hemingway's best work. He notes in particular the "moral courage and rejection of self-deception" expressed in the novel, and that balance between text and subtext which gave the work normative significance for so many Western writers. Startsev reveals the historical "subtext" of Hemingway's early prose: his broad interest in world affairs, his commitment to describe "faithfully" all events that had a profound effect on him.

Islands in the Stream makes us see the latest works of Hemingway in a new light. Startsev says forthrightly that the artist Hudson is the most gloomy of all of Hemingway's heroes. Nevertheless he convincingly shows that the novel continues the spiritual quests of the author. The closing words of the books on the value of friendship and understanding are compared with Harry Morgan's

last words in *To Have and Have Not*. The critic sees a connection between these behests and the theme of *The Old Man and the Sea*, the proposed epilogue to the "sea novel".

In *Islands in the Stream* the author often speaks of "bad times", referring, of course, not so much to the changing times of the narrative itself as to the "cold war", when the novel was written (1950-1961). But in speaking of this unfinished work one should by no means ignore *The Old Man and the Sea*, in which the author's Spanish experience is clearly reflected. This, after all, is a parable about the people, addressed during "bad times" to the post-war world.

Finally, one of the most important lines running through Startsev's book is the theme of America and Russia, the spiritual kinship between their leading writers. We will restrict ourselves to two very different examples. In his essay on Bret Harte the author devotes a good deal of attention to the opinion expressed by Chernyshevsky after reading two volumes of the California stories while in exile in Viluisk. Chernyshevsky responded most enthusiastically to the story "Miggles", to the free and natural moral code of the heroine.

In his concluding essay on Faulkner's trilogy Startsev underscores the point that the author made one of his favorite heroes, the sewing machine salesman and opponent of the Snopes, V. K. Ratliff, an American of Russian descent. The name hidden behind the initials *U. K.*, Vladimir Kyrilytsch, is profoundly symbolic. Russian literature for the novelist was an ally in his struggle against the evil threatening humanity and morals. We should add that it was an ally for Faulkner from the very start; in our view the surprising deciphering of the name reveals a genuine feeling of sympathy for Russian literature which the author nurtured during his whole writing career.

M. Landor

A PANORAMA OF AMERICAN SATIRE*

M. Mendelson, *Amerikanskaya satiricheskaya proza dvadtsatogo veka*, (*American Satirical Prose in the Twentieth Century*), Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1972, 370 pp.

The rapid strides made by Soviet criticism of American literature in recent years have allowed critics to shift from works of a broad, historical nature to in-depth studies of the works of well-known writers and of individual genres in American literature. The object of M. Mendelson's study is American satire, and he covers a broad range of material—from Mark Twain to the moderns.

American satirists, many of whom came to literature after accumulating a wealth of experience as newspapermen, have made extensive use of such forms as the lampoon and the sarcastic fable; they have not been afraid of hyperbole and pure caricature. Literary critics in Europe and America who take up the topic of American satire sometimes assert that there is little in it that qualifies as art, that it is merely entertaining and quite unrealistic. Mendelson convincingly demonstrates that such critics are in error.

The presence of low level newspaper "humor" should not lead one to overlook the existence of an original and powerful satirical tradition in American literature.

There are historical reasons for the rapid development of satire in American literature. These include the acute

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social contradictions of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the effectiveness of the progressive democratic tradition of self-criticism in opposing philistine and conformist tendencies of various types, and finally the fact that "American humor" is an organic element of the national character, which values wit, irony and laughter.

It is precisely in laughter, indignant and to the point, that Mendelson sees the nature and essence of satire. It portrays evil, vices and negative traits in an intentionally funny, grotesque, ironic form, employing even caricature and laying it on thick. In the opinion of Soviet literary critics this does not prevent satire from being a form of realistic art, i.e., from expressing, sometimes in a conventional and pointed manner, the essence of a given social phenomenon. In this sense Mendelson conclusively disputes the claims of such critics as L. Feinberg, the author of works on Sinclair Lewis, who see in satire an anti-artistic sort of exaggeration, various "distortions" and "retreat" from realism, which they understand to mean a verisimilar, photographic reproduction of reality.

Mendelson's book gives Soviet readers their first chance to understand fully the process of the development of satire in the United States. Mark Twain has completely overshadowed his younger contemporary, Peter Finley Dunne, the "creator" of the magniloquent Mr. Dooley, whose "philosophical" reflections on current affairs and events—the Spanish-American War, for example—are full of invective. Twain, Dunne, and Ambrose Bierce, who wrote with sarcasm and bitterness about the degeneration of democracy into plutocracy (*Fables Fantastiques, The Devil's Dictionary*) in many ways set the stage for the flowering of satire in the twenties and thirties of our century.

The central figure of this period was undoubtedly Sinclair Lewis—the central figure, but not the only one. In his short stories Ring Lardner created a whole gallery of satirical types—utterly self-confident "champions" who are empty inside, people who flourish in a land of Babbitts. Dorothy Parker pointed out the falseness behind

the external decorum of bourgeois civilization. There were other masterful satirists working during this period who are less well known; special sections of Mendelson's book are devoted to them. H. L. Mencken is known as a critic, but he also made considerable contributions as a satirical essayist ridiculing "boobosie", the specific product of philistine non-culture. Another outstanding satirist to make his debut in the thirties was Nathaniel West: the grotesque, fantastic images of his novel *A Cool Million* (1934), written in the spirit of Voltaire's *Candide*, reflect his open hatred for misanthropy in its American dress. We should note that this novel appeared a year before Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*. Also of interest are such satirists of the twenties and thirties as Robert Benchley, with his scorn for vulgar utilitarianism, Will Rodgers, Art Buchwald's predecessor, with his witty commentaries on political life, and especially James Thurber, creator of the archetypal Walter Mitty, an "average", timid American who hides from life behind starry-eyed fantasies.

The atmosphere of the immediate post-war years in the United States was not conducive to satire, but the tradition survived and was enriched by new themes: the fifties gave rise to satirical works which launched venomous attacks against the dehumanizing, depersonalizing traits of "mass society". The contradictions in this society provided a wealth of material for satire, thus accounting for its diversity—from the "cosmic" grotesque of Bradbury and Asimov to the subtle, ironic psychologism of Cheever. Certain traditional devices of American satire also underwent evolution. Simple, the hero of Langston Hughes' satirical dialogues, is more daring and decisive in his judgement of America than his distant literary predecessor Mr. Dooley. Art Buchwald has transformed the political feuilleton into an art. Satire has become an integral part of science fiction.

There can be little doubt that social reasons account for the proliferation of fantastic literature in the fifties and sixties. In a society that is experiencing profound internal disturbances there is always an acute need to

look into the future; the history of utopian quests demonstrates this. In contemporary American science fiction the anti-utopian line is very strong. For Ray Bradbury the America of the twenty-first century is not only a place where dehumanized technology reigns, but also a place where McCarthyism with its attack on freedom is carried to its logical extreme (*Fahrenheit 451*). We hear protests against the automation of man himself in Kurt Vonnegut (*Player Piano*). In the society of the future gifted children become merchandise (John Hersey's *The Child Buyer*), people are endowed with programmed, monotypic emotions (Robert Sheckley's *Pilgrimage to Earth*), undisguised violence spiced with eroticism is the rule (Thomas McGrath's *The Gates of Ivory, the Gates of Horn*).

Mendelson also touches on the specifically American school of "black humor", which has recently elicited a good deal of comment. The Soviet critic enters into dispute with those American critics who reduce black humor to the unrestrained element of the grotesque with an emphasis on dark, frightening elements. This formalistic approach in essence ignores the major problem associated with black humor, the fact that its representatives have an unhealthy view of the world, seeing in reality only chaos and the absurd, and refusing to evaluate reality in social or ethical terms (e.g., James Donleavy, Terry Southern, William Burroughs). But black humor must not be confused with realistic satire: superficial formal similarities should not lead us to equate Burroughs with, say, Joseph Heller, the author of an outstanding and in many ways innovative novel about the Second World War, *Catch-22*, which, one feels, is governed by the principle of humanism and reacts against the modernistic unrelievedly gloomy view of man.

It is only natural that in a work encompassing so broad a range of material certain phenomena will remain unexplored and certain omissions will inevitably occur. The satirical trend based on an uncompromizing, revolutionary criticism of the capitalist world deserves a good

deal more of attention. Anticipating the device of the satirical self-portrait so often employed by Lewis, John Reed painted a devastatingly accurate portrait of an American racist in his short story "Mac American". At the beginning of the twenties Lincoln Steffens wrote a series of parables and fables (continuing the tradition of George Ade and Ambrose Bierce) often based on biblical subjects. He came out as an irreconcilable opponent of political conservatism, a man convinced of the invincible forward march of history. A remarkable contribution was made to the development of satire by the communist writer, journalist and publicist, Mike Quin (1906-1947) who was held in high regard by Theodore Dreiser.

We encounter many authors in American literature who write in both the satirical and non-satirical vein (Lewis, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Caldwell, Bierce, Parker), a fact noted by the author of this study.

It would have been worthwhile, in my view, for the author to devote more attention to problems of the poetics of American satire. He should have drawn a clearer "line of demarcation" between satire and humorous writing, which itself constitutes an important tradition in American literature.

But one must realize the difficulties connected with this sort of elaboration of the material at hand, difficulties which are rooted in the material itself. And that material, as Mendelson's interesting and valuable work demonstrates, is exceptionally rich and diverse.

B. Gilenson

AN EXERCISE IN KANTIANISM*

Mary McCarthy, *Birds of America*,
N.Y., 1971, 344 pp.

Mary McCarthy's personal history has been no less remarkable than her literary career. She got her start in the pre-war years as theater critic for the *Partisan Review* and soon became a prominent figure in American journalistic and intellectual circles; she has taught college courses and published stories and novels. But until 1963 when the publication of *The Group* caused a sensation, the American public would hardly have ranked her as a leading prosaist.

The Group, in McCarthy's own words, deals "...with a period in America, from the inauguration of Roosevelt to the war, and with the idea of Progress". But her heroines, seniors at an exclusive college, remained in the "ante-chamber to the political history of the time", of the "New Deal". Whatever progressive (or ostensibly progressive) aspirations arose in these young women, they appear to have progressed primarily in the realm of intimate relations.

Mary McCarthy's novel *Birds of America* covers a small time period, but one replete with significant events both in America and abroad: the period from autumn of 1964 to spring of 1965. The program for a "Great Society" had just been announced; the long war in Vietnam had just begun; an unprecedented number of votes had been cast for the 37th president, Lyndon B. Johnson; and

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the latest long hot summer had once again struck America. The political and moral problems connected with these events are not simply posed or reflected in the book, rather they form the very fibre of the narrative interwoven with the story of a young man's spiritual quest.

Birds of America could be considered a didactic novel were it not for one decisive factor. Nineteen-year-old Peter Levi, sent by his parents to the Sorbonne (and here the reader will recognize the traditional American literary theme of the American in Paris), becomes convinced that much of his upbringing and schooling is worthless; he faces the collapse of the system of values in which he believed.

"But what do you like about America?" Rosamund Brown asks historian Levi, an Italian emigrant. "I like the American birds..." he replies. Peter Levi has acquired his father's love for birds. He is no expert on the subject, but has a high regard for ornithology as one of the few purely empirical sciences: "You simply watched birds and did not try to change them biologically."

During the summer when Rosamund, who had just divorced her second husband, brought 15-year-old Peter from Berkeley to the unillustrious New England town of Rocky Port, the strongest imprint on his memory was made by three large immobile cormorants perched on the pilings at the end of the cape. Those "horribly ancient" birds who "resembled hieroglyphs or emblems on an escutcheon" were as mysterious and incomprehensible to Peter as the announcement, five years later in Paris, of the American bombing raids on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

These two impressions form the chronological boundaries of the hero's discovery of himself. Boldly exploring the metaphorical possibilities of the concept of "birds", inventively exploiting ornithological symbolism, Mary McCarthy carefully erects a thematic and artistic structure for her novel. Naturally, the most important "birds" in her novel are people of different sizes, colors, and eminence.

The citizens of Rocky Port, who have found an illusory relief from the rat race of professional and social activities in old-fashioned customs, young people's gatherings and processions, are colorful indeed. Just as colorful is the motley crowd gathered for the traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner at the Paris home of NATO General Lammers. An expressive image is conveyed in the portrait of the sociologist and sophist Beverley F. Small, who ably contrasts the superiority of the American way of life to the "little man" Peter's foggy egalitarian impulses.

Among those American birds of the subspecies "white, middle-income intelligentsia", described precisely and at length with more than a few strokes of irony and satire, the mother of the hero comes, at times, to the forefront. This willful, decisive woman is slightly over forty. A liberal and perhaps even a socialist, she is worthy of her forebears, New England pioneers.

The hero's ancestry stresses his attachment, on the one hand, to traditional, grass-roots Americanism, and, on the other hand, to the enduring values of European history and art.

Those chapters which describe Peter's arrival in Rome at Christmastime and his reflections by the image of the Delphic Sibyl in the Sistine Chapel are telling. In Italy "the world's problems did not clamor at him for solutions. . . . *Ars longa—vita brevis* was a truth that could not be argued with in the Eternal City. . .". Only in Rome among the Baroque constructions of Borromini with their nervous disharmony, elusive structure and concrete form, can he feel that he truly exists. But at the same time, although he joins in the conversations about Malraux's cultural policies, James Baldwin and the Black movement, existentialism, structuralism, and France's refusal to admit England to the Common Market, he understands that he is infinitely distant from it all: "The word 'contemporary' was high on Peter's aversion list." Here then is a new variant on the theme of youth so frequently encountered in Western literature.

A year ago Peter had participated in some way in the civil-rights movement, to soothe his white, liberal conscience, as he himself admits. That summer in Rocky Port he tore several campaign decals from the cars of people who supported Goldwater. And once, together with his mother, he was arrested for civil disobedience on a protest march on the date of some local historical event, just like Thoreau. In Paris, Peter happens to witness a student demonstration. He is about to hurl a flower pot at the head of the most enthusiastic gendarme, but he is stopped by his own indecisiveness.

Peter is relentlessly pursued along the pages of the novel by the shadow of Kant. In accordance with his epistemological teachings, every effort made by Peter to understand events leads to contradictory answers. "Why can't we find words to express a classless ideal?" he despairs. The French should have chopped off the heads of other things besides statues and people. "...They should have chopped off the head of language while they were at it...if it had been done in 1789, possibly I'd be able to think clearly today."

His thirst for clarity and the experience of living in cheap Parisian hotels leads him to conclude that humanity may be divided into those who have clean toilet habits and those who do not: "If there was no agreement on a primary matter like that, then it was useless to look for agreement on 'higher' principles."

Peter's fruitless attempts to grasp the motley plumage of the ultimate, integral truth of his times introduces the problem of self-identification into the narrative: "Who am I at this juncture in history?" At times he feels that he is "just an epiphenomenon of your joint history—a wandering footnote". At times, despite the "anti-Americanism in himself", he feels like America's envoy to the Old World, called upon to enlighten the naive Europeans who are not burdened by the fruits of the technological civilization about the true problems of America. At times, because of his name ("levite" means "priest" in Hebrew), he imagines himself as a kind of messiah, bearing the

torch of a new faith in nature and the commonweal. The basis of this faith is a yearning for nature, not "Mother Nature", but "Miss Nature", that impersonal, non-anthropomorphized nature that contemporary civilization is destroying. McCarthy has constructed an entire system of descriptive devices in order to reveal the hero's unrestrained longing to return to nature. We see the pangs of pity that Peter as a boy felt "for mute, innocent matter, pummeled and interrogated by Hans and his fellow-scientists, whom he pictured as a sort of Gestapo". Then there is the ostensibly passing incident where Peter furtively tears a few strands of ivy from a statue and feels "like Prometheus, with a gift of green fire".

In Peter's disoriented, receptive consciousness that absorbs all impressions indiscriminately, a complex algebraic sum of heterogeneous ideas assumes the contours of a utopian society precisely oriented to conservative, romantic notions.

Peter Levi makes every effort to remain true to Kant's ethical teachings. An action is moral, preaches the great German philosopher, if performed out of respect for moral laws rather than out of inclination. To fulfil his moral duty, our hero manages to overcome his revulsion and clean the common lavatory. This scene is imbued with wistful symbolism. On another occasion, overcoming doubts and an incomprehensible shame, he brings a *clocharde*, half-drunken and beggarly, to his apartment and provides a night's food and shelter. But a sense of human solidarity, which is the only feeling that might give meaning to his impulsive action, never arises in him. To the contrary he senses that "between himself and this woman was an immeasurable distance. . .", that "she was poisoning his good deed" with the stink of her drunken, unwashed body and old clothes. This episode, where his starry-eyed image of man as a moral being free to determine his own actions is shattered at one blow, is coupled with another, even more symbolic episode. On the day when the commencement of bombing raids on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is announced, Peter is cruelly

bitten on the hand by a black swan while trying to feed it a roll. Neither morality, man, nor nature meets his expectations; they deceive him, strike at him. One hundred years ago, a well-known philosopher and philologist informed the world: "God is dead." On the last page of this contemporary novel, old Kant, sitting at Peter's sick-bed, intones: "Nature is dead." Where can poor humanity go from here?!

Upon arriving in Paris, Peter quickly becomes aware that "the categorical imperative" is not the best guide to the conduct for an American in Europe. By the same token, the hero of McCarthy's novel will hardly manage to resolve the contradictions of the modern world by means of Kantian ethical categories. Peter Levi's antinomies of "pure reason" (as well as the lessons of his father, "a mainstay of the anti-Communist left") consistently lead to a fear of responsibility; he is compelled to seek the golden mean and to preserve the status quo. In the final analysis this leads to moral and political ambiguity. The authoress' rather ironic view of her hero only aggravates the problem. *Cosa fatta capo ha*, old Levi loves to repeat; everything has its cause. If it is true that an author's social attitudes are inevitably expressed in his works, then Mary McCarthy's *Birds of America* reflects the system of "independent" liberal values which she has held since the late thirties. But her pluralism and eclecticism create a mere façade of objectivity.

For all its colorful scenes of daily life and customs (particularly in the chapters dealing with New England), its buoyant ironic style and wealth of realia, McCarthy's novel gives the impression of being slightly schematized. Peter Levi does not so much live and experience events as run through exercises in Kantianism. Observations on man and society are never elevated to the level of art, and in places the book is no more than an illustrated treatise on Western culture.

G. Zlobin

MR. SAMMLER'S PLANET*

Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*,
N.Y., Viking Press, 1970, 313 pp.

Mr. Sammler's Planet is Saul Bellow's first novel since *Herzog* in 1964; during the six-year interval between these works, Bellow published only a collection of short stories and a play—not "his" genres. Bellow, a born novelist, is at home only in a broad narrative framework. All of his books may be viewed as fragments of a modern American epos, one which does not encompass all aspects of American life, but is nevertheless inspired with reflections and quests for "fundamental truth". Bellow's native element is the big city; his observations are usually confined to the life of the middle classes, the intelligentsia and the petty bourgeoisie. In *The Adventures of Augie March*, for example, (pub. 1953) Bellow presents an expressive picture of poor immigrants in Chicago during the twenties. Bellow, a "realist of the flesh" who is sensitive to all the idiosyncracies of American society, can extract the grain of comedy from the absurdities of modern Western civilization. But he is clearly far from being a black humorist. With arch humility, he calls himself an old-fashioned author thereby hoping to stand in opposition to the intelligentsia for whom spiritual self-

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fragmentation became almost a social responsibility: he takes the unyielding moral position of the humanist defending ethical values, sources and traditions from the onslaughts of barbarian nihilism of the "neoprimitivists". *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is, in this sense, characteristic and in full harmony with Bellow's earlier works. A "domestic philosopher", for whom constant meditation about life—with excursions into the past and the future—is an integral, human need, is placed in the thick of major events, such as the flights to the moon, where astronauts open new horizons to the inhabitants of the Earth, and of minor events creating a spontaneous, human atmosphere.

Arthur Sammler, the protagonist, is somewhat unusual in the context of Bellow's previous characters, all either native Americans or at least second generation citizens, children of immigrants who had settled in the country before they were born. Arthur Sammler is a Polish Jew. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, he lived in London and came to the United States only in 1947, when his American nephew Gruner, a wealthy physician, located him in a camp for displaced persons; Gruner helped not only Sammler, but also his daughter Shula to settle in the States, and continued to support them. The second exceptional trait of Sammler is his advanced age; he is over seventy and has experienced many things—both those which are part of the natural course of things and those inherent to his own unique circumstances. Essentially, Mr. Sammler is living a second life; he was shot by the Germans in 1940, together with his wife and many other people in occupied Poland. By a miracle, he survived and dug himself out through a mountain of corpses filling a mass grave which the victims had dug for themselves before they were shot. Sammler, blinded on that day in one eye by a blow with a rifle butt, dug the grave alongside his wife. They were all naked. The thing that crawled out from the bloody ditch and hid in a nearby forest was not the former Arthur Sammler—an intellectual, a European, the friend of H. G. Wells and the Bloomsbury Group. He fought with the partisans in a

group and alone, hid in a crypt, rotted in a camp for fugitives. He discovered within himself profound human instincts whose existence he had never suspected and forgot almost everything that had once seemed natural and important. With time Sammler came back to life, began to think again, resurrected his human attachments, and, most importantly, developed intensive interest in life, a selfless, "domestically" philosophical interest. All of Bellow's previous heroes—the frivolous, good-hearted adventurer Augie March floating through the stormy, dirty sea of life, Professor Herzog, and the weak-willed little people of the early short stories and novellas—were largely slaves to their own emotions and could rise above the chaos of daily life only through great efforts. This is easy for Arthur Sammler; he is old, his whole life has been marked by irremediable catastrophe and he is an alien in America, a European with a lot of intellectual baggage and a considerable store of historical memories. Sammler has religious feelings which, though ill-defined, seem to him a necessary part of his existence. People around Sammler see him as a wise man and confessor; they bring all their motley, at times, strange, and unattractive troubles and questions to his doorstep. In fact, Sammler cannot resolve all human problems, but is simply an old gentleman who knows how to listen, has a broad mind, and retains the internal and external breeding forgotten by or unknown to modern Americans. Despite his objectivity, Sammler does not want to play the role of a hermit, untouched by the transgressions of his fellow men and the fate of the planet. Quite the contrary, the tall, gaunt, one-eyed old man seethes with constant inner turmoil: he feels himself a small island in the calamities and antagonisms of the modern world, and at the same time, responsible for events in that world.

In a conversation about his novel, Bellow noted that the episodes in *Mr. Sammler* are typical of the madness that characterizes the life of New York's middle classes today. For several days in 1969, Mr. Sammler not only witnesses this "madness" but personally comes into contact

with it. In scenes of almost grotesque poignancy we see the sexual license found even among Mr. Sammler's close relatives, the Gruners; the unpunished crime that overwhelms even the streets of the bourgeois neighborhood in the West Side; the moral and intellectual anarchy of the great majority of young students; the cupidity, and the frenzy for business: all aspects of the lack of spirituality in this mercantile society. This is both comic and tragic because, in the final analysis, we are speaking of the future of our planet which is on the brink of inhabiting other worlds.

"Well, now, what would one carry out to the moon?" meditates Mr. Sammler as he reads the manuscript of a visiting Indian scholar; it is a project for colonization of the moon, that came into his hands in an unusual way. Sammler's daughter, a woman more than eccentric but deeply devoted to her father, stole it from Dr. Lal. Thus Sammler became acquainted with the Punjabi scholar. It was a significant encounter for both, and, obviously, a promising encounter for the dear widow of Sammler's nephew. . . . The story of the lost and retrieved manuscript is one plot line of the novel; another shows the last days of Gruner, as he lies dying in the hospital, and his relations with the children and Sammler; a third follows the silent duel between Sammler and the exquisitely dressed, insolent pickpocket who regularly works the bus in which our hero rides. . . . But these do not determine the course of the novel which flows along with the sober and bitter thoughts of Mr. Sammler, who makes no pretence at creating a program or at making prescriptions, but remains full of faith in mankind.

I. Levidova

“FICTION” AND FICTION*

Erich Segal, *Love Story*, N. Y., New American Library, 1971, 131 pp.

There's such a thing as great literature. There's such a thing as serious literature. There's such a thing as literature which examines the social dimensions of life and the depths of the human heart. There is, in short, such a thing as literature. Side by side there exists something called popular fiction, whose goals are far more modest: to distract, to entertain, to provide mental relaxation, to arouse the emotions with a fast moving story that may be as banal as life itself or, on the contrary, more romantic than life could ever be. Popular fiction reflects life in its own way, and demands a certain kind of participation on the reader's part, a certain “moral reaction”, and may provide him with information on certain aspects of life, telling him something, or else reminding him of something. But it does all these things on a considerably more superficial, facile level than serious literature.

There is no real reason to single out Segal's story for a review—there are any number of stories and novels of this sort published in the West which embody the norms of popular fiction. And if some of them happen to become bestsellers, that too is nothing unusual. The mass book market is the mass book market, and the ordinary reader in England and America now, as always, prefers P. G. Wodehouse to C. P. Snow and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* to Thomas Wolfe's novels. But the

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success of Segal's story was unprecedented, even from the point of view of the market, as was the success of the film directed by Arthur Hiller (for which Segal himself wrote the script). The point, though, is that Segal, a professor of classical philosophy at Yale University, while by no means a great master of the word (a fact no one will dispute), cannot be called a purveyor of pulp, the sort which floods America. *Love Story* (1970) is his first book, and it is written on the level of good, standard popular fiction. It corresponds fairly closely to all the standards of popular fiction, except that it is extremely laconic. Making no pretence about mastering the famous "iceberg method", the author tells the life story of his two young heroes in 131 pages; he does so simply, succinctly, concisely, at times even too cryptically, but always with a touch of irony and undoubted bias, a sympathy for the characters he has created. The story is told in the first person, a form traditional for American literature that deals with youth, from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and carried over into popular fiction.

The simple story tells how young Oliver Barrett IV, the son of a rich banker, a student at Harvard and the star of the college hockey team, falls in love with the daughter of a baker, and what makes it worse, an Italian baker, one Jennifer Cavilleri, also a student at Harvard. A typical product of his environment and upbringing, Oliver is not exactly "re-born" under the influence of his romance; rather he finds the courage to oppose his family openly by marrying Jenny, thus being denied his father's financial support. The young couple begin to make their own way in life. Giving up the chance to study music in Paris, Jenny goes to work as a teacher, helping to support the family while Oliver finishes law school and establishes himself in a reputable firm. Everything seems to be going right and it begins to look as if their life together is an embodiment of the American Dream. But then Jenny dies of leukemia. The story ends with the death of the heroine. The picture Segal paints has fairly narrow

confines, and he does not touch on many problems troubling Americans today. Basically he limits himself to what is indicated in the title. But the little that Segal does write is fairly interesting and revealing—the author's attitude toward, say, Oliver Barrett III, who suffers total moral defeat in the tale. The author is sufficiently straightforward in his condemnation of a world view dictated by the philosophy of acquiring money and high social status: there are obvious satirical intonations in Segal's depiction of Oliver's parents. The author clearly shows how difficult life is for the American University student who has to support himself while studying.

Despite its lack of pretention to real art, it would seem that the primary reason for *Love Story's* phenomenal success both in America and abroad is its humanity and democratic quality. The author reminds his reader of certain simple and well-known truths. About the purity and loftiness of a profound feeling of love—at a time when the book market in the United States is flooded with works abounding in descriptions, not only of plain sex, but of the most unthinkable perversions, works which openly treat love as something hopelessly outmoded. The author reminds his reader that money is not all-powerful when it comes to man. That life is not quite so smooth and carefree as it is presented in official propaganda.

So there is a difference between “fiction” and fiction. There is a sort of popular fiction which strives to cultivate a healthy sense of morality in the reader. And there is a sort of fiction which propagates cruelty, racism, unscrupulousness. In our times it is simply imperative to distinguish between these two types of fiction, just as it is imperative to approach seriously and discriminatingly the study of what today is passed off as “mass culture”. The case of *Love Story* also demonstrates this necessity: it would be just as unforgivable—and even vulgar—to compare him with a Mickey Spillane, as it would be to liken him to Dreiser.

U. Skorodenko

THE LESSONS OF ARCHIBALD MACLEISH*

Archibald Macleish, *The Human Season. Selected Poems*, Houghton Mifflin, 1972, 161 pp.

Archibald Macleish, one of the greatest American poets of the twentieth century, marked his eightieth birthday by publishing a collection of verse entitled *The Human Season*. The poems were selected with great care, as the author himself comments in the preface. What were the works closest to him, the ones he valued most highly? The collection includes verses dating back to 1926. But Macleish had published a number of books before that date, and in the well known collections of 1952 and 1963 he included verses from his earlier books. Now he rejected these pieces. Does this fact say something about the poet? Undoubtedly.

Many of the works Macleish wrote in the twenties manifested the characteristic traits of the aesthetics of modernism, aesthetics leading to artificiality in art. This was particularly noticeable in the collection *The Happy Marriage* (1924). In the 1963 collection twenty-three poems from this book were reprinted. These are the ones which Macleish has now rejected, as well as ones from a still earlier book, *Tower of Ivory*, whose very title symbolizes the self-contained art of aesthetes. That is the first fundamentally important lesson.

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Although the poems in the new collection (as opposed to the earlier ones) are ordered thematically rather than chronologically, it is not difficult to establish that he has preserved only one book in its entirety: *Frescos for Mr. Rockefeller's City*, published in 1933.

The rather unusual title of the book has a history all its own. At the time New York's Rockefeller Center, begun at the height of the Depression, was being completed. Diego Rivera was invited to do the frescos for the central hall of Radio City; in one of the central frescos he drew a portrait of Lenin, symbolizing the unity of working men throughout the world. As a result Rivera was dismissed and his frescos destroyed. This political act aroused the indignation of progressive America. Archibald Macleish's collection of poems also represented a response to these events; the poet offered, as it were, his poetic "frescos" to replace those which had been destroyed.

Expanding the basic theme of his poem "Conquistador", published a year earlier and describing the destruction that the colonizers left in their wake, Macleish chose the reality of the United States of America as the object of his poetic investigation in *Frescos*. He is sharply critical of the activities of monopolies and speaks about the disastrous consequences of capitalist management, disastrous for individuals and for the country as a whole:

*They screwed her scrawny and gaunt with their
seven-year panics;
They bought her back on their mortgages
old-whore-cheap:
They fattened their bonds at her breasts till the
thin blood ran from them.*

These lines from one of the "frescos", the poem "Empire Builders", satirizes the financial and industrial giants of America.

Another "fresco", "Wildwest", describes the cruel annihilation of the Indians, the seizure of their land, which the railroad builders were particularly eager to lay their hands on. The short, unpretentious phrases of

the Indian who tells the story, create the image of a man whose name has become a legend.

Crazy Horse (1849-1877) was the chief of the Sioux Indians. His village was destroyed by government troops during a punitive expedition. The Indians had to take up arms to protect themselves. All the members of the punitive expedition, including Commander Custer, were killed in battle. We should note that later the American government erected a monument to Custer on this spot (not far from Billings, Montana). Macleish's poem came to stand as a poetic monument to Crazy Horse, the people's defender:

*Crazy Horse had done it with few numbers.
Crazy Horse was small for a Lakota.
He was riding always alone thinking of
something. . . .*

*When the soldiers came for him there on the
other side
On the Greasy Grass in the villages we were
shouting
"Hoka Hey! Crazy Horse will be riding!"
They fought in the water: horses were drowning:
They rode on the butte: dust settled in sunlight:
Hoka Hey! they lay on the bloody ground.
No one could tell of the dead which man was
Custer. . . .*

*Do you ask why he should fight? It was his
country:
My God should he not fight? It was his.
But after the Tongue there were no herds to be
hunting. . . .*

But "Wildwest" also gives a laconic and ample description of the norms of the bourgeois world. The government takes the land seized from the Indians and generously distributes it among various railroad companies

which spare no means in their attempt to wrest from each other this source of fabulous profit.

In the poem "Burying Ground by the Ties"—from the same book of "Frescos"—the theme of the building of the railroads is developed in a somewhat different way. Here we hear the voices of those who perished, the black, Portuguese, Hungarian, Polish, Scottish and Chinese workers who "laid the steel to this land from ocean to ocean", whose bones and blood lay under the first trans-continental railway, the famous "Union Pacific". The murmur of the dead rises from the earth and grows into a terrible cry of accusation against the propertied classes:

*Ayee! but there's weight to the earth under it.
Not for this did we come out—to be lying here
Nameless under the ties in the clay cuts:
There's nothing good in the world but the rich
will buy it:
Everything sticks to the grease of a gold note—
Even a continent—even a new sky!*

"Burying Ground by the Ties" allies itself with the great Whitman tradition, in which simple toilers are the real heroes.

A sense of civic duty coupled with anti-imperialist convictions—that is the second lesson of Archibald Macleish, whose best works reveal a constant concern for the most important social problems of the age.

An anti-fascist poet, Macleish came out against McCarthyism and condemned America's Indochina policies in the post-war years. But perhaps the most noteworthy day in Macleish's creative life was June 4, 1937, when he chaired the opening session of the Second Congress of American Writers, which called for solidarity among all progressive American forces in the struggle against reaction, fascism and war. This period in Macleish's creative life is represented in his new collection by one of his best poems, "Speech to Those Who Say Comrade", a work remarkable for its publicistic passion and spirit of internationalism.

And now a word about the title of the collection and about yet another lesson that Macleish teaches. *The Human Season* is the way Macleish describes autumn (twice repeated) in his marvellous poem "Immortal Autumn". Not only the title, but also the feeling of sweet melancholy, profound peace and the sensuously concrete images recall Keats' remarkable ode "To Autumn". The very spirit of Macleish's poem evokes Keatsian associations. Autumnal nature represents a genuinely humane, creative, life-affirming principle: the poet sets it in contrast to that disharmony, that destructive essence and chaos of life which he has sought so long and agonizingly to escape.

But Macleish does not merely rely on the poetic experience of the past; he enriches his verse by incorporating the poetic achievements of the twentieth century, often showing himself a daring innovator and experimenter. His "Autumn" functions on many levels. It represents a real picture of the author's favorite season, and a feeling for the dynamics of life, the inevitability of change, where autumn is the most human of the seasons, combining features of summer and winter. Autumn is also perceived as a turning point, a period of instability and anxiety, one that calls forth melancholy feelings of loneliness in the boundless, barren wilderness of life. There are also associations hinting at a profound personal tragedy, the death of a loved one. In the voices of autumnal nature the author can hear the lament of that tragic autumn and the cry of the one who has died sounding across the barrier of time. And, finally, here in the context of the title of the collection *The Human Season*, the poem acquires a new and broader meaning.

Poetry is often close to philosophy. For Macleish, however, the multiplanar quality of the poetic image, the profound philosophical subtext of the work, the striving for universality and generalization, for the revelation, not of a single episode, but of the very essence of a phenomenon—these are the things that constitute the most fundamental and characteristic features of creative work.

He remains a philosopher both in his civic poetry and in his love lyrics, and for that reason even his most intimate verses suddenly acquire a clearly apparent social subtext, as in "The Late Meeting".

Macleish's poetry is invariably distinguished by high poetic culture, a sense of completion and perfection. Such poems as "Immortal Autumn", "The End to the World" and "You, Andrew Marvell" are twentieth century classics. They are so pregnant with meaning, they work on so many levels, their orchestration is so rich, the poetic idea is so organically realized in the rhythmic system of sounds, words, syntactical constructions and images, that it is extraordinarily difficult to render them satisfactorily in another language.

Macleish once wrote a poem called "Poet (for Ernest Hemingway)" which is in essence a self-portrait of the untiring, exacting, selfless artist.

Carl Sandburg, who was a close friend of Macleish, once said, "I am not sure what an authentic poet is, but I know Archibald Macleish is one".

Authentic poetry: that, perhaps, is still another lesson, maybe the most important one, that we learn from Archibald Macleish.

I. Popov

IN CRISIS*

John Updike, *Museums and Women and Other Stories*, N. Y., 1972, 282 pp.

John Updike first appeared on the American literary horizon at the end of the 50s, and almost immediately thereafter the attention of critics and readers was riveted on him.

Updike's early novels (*The Poorhouse Fair*, *Rabbit, Run*) embodied with tremendous artistic force a sensation of acute anxiety over the lives of ordinary Americans living in a society which appears to be flourishing, but which in fact is shaken by a profound internal crisis; this sensation in turn evokes a semi-conscious but profound, deep-rooted protest against the conformist logic of bourgeois existence.

The greatest creative achievement of the artist as a young man was his novel *The Centaur* (1963, Russian translation—1965) which won the National Book Award. It is a complex and multilayered work. The life of the modern centaur Chiron, the provincial teacher George Caldwell, is transformed into a unique philosophical "fable" on the destiny of an honest man living in America today. Subsequently the author's study of the social and psychological roots of conformism was extended in his remarkable story "Of the Farm" (1965, Russian

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translation—1967) and in *Couples* (1968), which, despite the mastery with which it is written, reveals agonizing contradictions in the author's work, the limitations imposed on his critical vision by the framework of an exclusive social microcosm.

Updike is indisputably successful both as a psychologist and as a sociologist documenting American life and morals; but he does not see the principles countervailing the atmosphere of dreary spiritual emptiness in which his heroes live, and this makes his satirical portraits one-sided, and erotic experiences the dominant leitmotif of the narration. The symptoms of a dangerous crisis in the author's work which first made their appearance in *Couples* are revealed in full force in *Rabbit Redux* (1971). In this book the "rebellion" of the hero does not move beyond the poles of marriage and adultery (both of which the novelist describes in detail with extreme persistence and care).

While novels are the most significant side of Updike's individuality as a writer, he owes his popularity in no small measure to his short stories.

Updike's collection *Museums and Women and Other Stories* (1972) contains stories previously published in magazines (mainly in *The New Yorker*) in the second half of the 60s and early 70s. It is considerably larger than his preceding collections (29 stories are included) and gives some idea of the growing mastery of the writer and certain crises which underlay his work.

The motifs and situations in Updike's stories are akin to the problematics of his novels. Moreover, in this "small form" the writer feels greater freedom, revealing exceptional inventiveness in the way he arranges life situations. The stories in the collection are subdivided into three groups by theme and genre. The stories in the first part are more or less connected to events in the author's life. The stories in the second part are stylized fables or parables collected under the heading "Other Modes"; the characters are inhabitants of the primeval animal world in whose behavior the author sees, with sarcasm,

characteristic traits of the contemporary American bourgeois and the bohemians of the literary world. In the third part the author portrays in satirical tones the everyday existence of the Maples family, their petty concerns and anxieties, their constant desire to "keep in step with the times".

The humdrum life of a family, the sleepy pace of a provincial town, the green lawns and resonant silence of university campuses—the reader has often encountered these scenes in Updike's prose. The writer is amazingly consistent in his choice of real settings. A master when it comes to everyday details, he can create an atmosphere of unerring authenticity with one or two laconic strokes. Nothing out of the ordinary happens in Tarbox; hippies settle on a hill, and the respectable philistines of the town greet them with a threatening silence, and there is an anxious sense of a foreboding in the air (one of the most powerful stories in the collection, "The Hillies"); an old bachelor—the best bass in the local church choir—commits suicide ("The Carol Sing"); accidents happen one after the other at an awkward bend in the road, which the city officials have always intended to widen ("The Corner").

The accuracy of these descriptions of everyday life cannot, however, be equated with the regionalism of "provincial prose". Ordinary, even banal life situations are presented in an unusual perspective, casting light on unexpected moral and psychological aspects of the situation described: thus a melancholy, pathetic story about the break-up of a marriage and the desolation that descends on a suburban home assumes the form of a unique "biography" of a swimming pool ("The Orphaned Swimming Pool"). "Plumbing" is a story with pervasive notes of nostalgic lyricism and sadness over intimate human values which can never be retrieved from the past. Sometimes Updike's lyricism acquires a penetrating, Chekhovian ring (Chekhov and Updike are both characterized by an unusual transparency and masterful simplicity of language, qualities typical for a number of stories in this collection).

A number of stories are very close in form to the genre of the essay, embodying Updike's own reflections on love, time, nature and art ("Museums and Women", "The Sea's Green Sameness"). Thus the practically plotless title story of the collection is a fantastic montage of associations linking the impressions gleaned by the hero during visits to museums at various moments in his life, and his relations with his mother, his beloved, and his wife. Like Marcel Proust, Updike has mastered a purely impressionistic form of art and can capture the bright moment and bring it to life.

The power of such stories as "The Day of the Dying Rabbit" and "Man and Daughter in the Cold" lies in the author's ability to penetrate deeply into the essence of personal, intimate impulses and motives which even the characters themselves do not always recognize. Updike is most realistic when he is depicting personal love and family relationships, and it is precisely these human values that he affirms as an artist. But at times the fact that the writer and the microcosm he portrays are isolated from the stormy social and political conflicts of the outside world, wreaks its own vengeance on the author, distorting his artistic vision.

Thus there is something monotonous and superficial about the story of a young American with an inferiority complex who makes a trip to Egypt (the longest story in the collection, "I am Dying, Egypt, Dying", first published in 1969); thematically this story goes back to what is perhaps the weakest work published by Updike, a collection of stories united by a single character, *Bech: a Book* (1970). The life of a country on the verge of a dangerous military conflict does not, incredibly enough, disturb either the author or his hero, who is trying without success to achieve sexual freedom in the bed of a young, emancipated Swedish woman. We note the emphatically aloof attitude of the writer toward the social cataclysms within the United States: in "Marching Through Boston" the Maples, afraid of being left behind by the times, take part in a civil rights march, and the consequences are

absolutely prosaic; they are soaked in the rain, catch cold and have a falling out. Updike's satirical jabs are obviously directed at the pseudo-intellectual philistinism of his heroes; it is regretful, however, that the writer did not attempt to give his readers an idea of the collective aspirations of other participants.

When the author assumes this sort of stance it is bound to tell on his satirical sketches; here, one must acknowledge, the critical force of the grotesque images is considerably inferior to the denunciatory spirit of analogous episodes in *Couples*, which is thematically related to the stories in "the Maples cycle".

The author's aloofness from social problems, the rejection of civic social values manifested in a number of stories in this collection would seem to explain the crisis in personal values which Updike appears to be heading for now. Nostalgia, reflections on the transience of youth and life in general, the vanity of human aspirations in the face of "eternal" nature—it is no coincidence that all these things appear with greater force in *Museums and Women* than in any preceding work.

The last value animating the artist (and here we recall Updike's French master, Marcel Proust) is art. Gazing into the impenetrable jade ocean ("The Sea's Green Sameness"), the writer reflects: what can be said about the sea today "...after Plato, after Aquinas, after Einstein? Have not their brave fancies already gone the way of Poseidon?"

For the author of the short story the sea is a miracle, an eternal presence in the universe (this sort of awed, inquisitive attitude toward live reality links Updike with another of his teachers, D. H. Lawrence). This miracle constantly astounds the artist and simultaneously stimulates his will to comprehend and makes him a creator.

John Updike's book of stories shows that this talented writer, whose best works have helped us to understand a good deal about contemporary American society, is now at a decisive turning point in his career.

N. Paltsev

FAITH IN THE GOOD*

John Gardner, *Nickel Mountain*, N. Y.,
1973, 312 pp.

John Gardner is the “discovery” of the seventies. In his fortieth year he has involuntarily been taken for a novice, although *Nickel Mountain* is his fourth novel. The first two novels went unnoticed. Then, in 1972, *Sunlight Dialogues* was a resounding success and people became very interested in the writer. *Nickel Mountain* shows that those who had faith in Gardner were eminently justified.

The author defines it as “a pastoral novel”, and it requires thoughtful, analytic reading. The plot is simple; it is the story of ordinary-looking people, and perhaps not even a story but a picture of several years in the life of the inhabitants of a remote northern province. Henry Soames, the protagonist, owns a modest roadside restaurant. His clients—drivers and neighbors from local farms—are simple Americans immersed in their daily cares and living a difficult, harsh, spartan existence. But perhaps it is this very life that has allowed them to retain their humanity.

From the first pages, one senses that this is a most unusual novel. Its uniqueness is not only due to the rich, buoyant prose, the strict, clear rhythms of the narration reminiscent of the poetry of Robert Frost, but to the fact

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that the world and characters depicted here are not clichés. Gardner's heroes hark back to the traditions of Steinbeck during the period of *Pastures of Heaven* and *Of Mice and Men*, traditions long ago consigned to oblivion. Now John Gardner's pen, like that of Joyce Carol Oates (at least in some of her works), has brought these traditions back to life.

One should not be deceived by the subtitle: "A Pastoral Novel". Gardner's book is pastoral only in its setting, its atmosphere. The writer must be acknowledged as a master in his evocation of the subdued beauty of the American North. Its mountains, forests, valleys, snow-drifts, tumble-down fortifications from the War of Independence, its paths laid in the midst of hazel thickets—all of this purely American, almost tangible beauty depicted by Gardner is by no means formal beauty.

Gardner's attention to nature, to the landscape and the everyday environment of his characters, is a "kindred attention", to borrow an aphorism from Soviet writer Mikhail Prishvin when he describes the attention one pays to the "personality" of nature herself as the most essential characteristic of major fiction. Gardner's heroes are not only organically blended into a world of their own; they are dissolved in that world, and this allows Gardner's laconic, compact novel to take on the dimensions of an epic. The novel might even be considered a modern saga. *Nickel Mountain* belongs to "philosophical" literature. But insofar as we are speaking of Gardner, this is imprecise; one must speak not of the philosophical bent of the author, but rather of the principal idea hidden somewhere at the very bottom of the narrative and surfacing in the natural development of the conflict; here there is no deliberate philosophical didacticism.

A middle-aged man who suffers from severe heart disease marries a 16-year-old girl who works in his restaurant. He marries her knowing that she is pregnant by driver Willard Freund, who has abandoned her. He left the town where he was born to become a professional racer. Soames' deed has various motivations. He longs to

overcome his feeling of loneliness, if only before he dies. He hopes to leave behind not a remote little drive-in on the road, but a family, a child whom he might learn to love as his own. He sympathizes with Callie, the daughter of old friends, who has gotten into trouble. Then there are practical, household calculations and later the agonizing stirrings of physical passion.

Mainly he senses that he is spending the last days of his life in a blind alley. Its emptiness and moral senselessness cannot be overcome unless he shares that life with someone close to him, someone whose sorrow can be taken as his own. Finally, although Henry never admits it, there is his inborn unshakable goodness, his conscientiousness. He is tormented not so much by the fact that he himself has been tainted by something in his life, but by the fact that he is surrounded by evil, indifference, hard-heartedness and people who struggle ruthlessly for their own interests.

The two major themes of the novel are Henry's effort to set his life right in terms of reason and morality, if only at its very end, to govern his own life rather than swim with the current, and the constant testing of his goodness. The development of these themes prepares the way for Gardner's principal idea which is clearly defined only in the concluding pages of the novel. *Nickel Mountain* is a novel about an ordinary man of our time whose past life has hardly been noteworthy, and about his efforts to comprehend the meaning of his life and the meaning of the life that surrounds him. Sometimes he puts this question openly to himself. More often than not he does so at the top of Nickel Mountain, where Henry loves to drive in the early morning hours when the fog has not dispersed and one can see only 20 or 30 yards ahead through the car window; one sees things in true perspective at such times, without the deceptive patches of sunlight and the shroud of rain that distorts all proportions. At times he formulates his arguments aloud. Henry has more than a few disputes with his friend, farmer George Loomis, who was wounded in Korea and is convinced

that evil rules the world. But usually Henry just observes himself and others closely; he listens attentively to people's conversations and watches over Callie, who came to work in his restaurant to earn enough money to study in New York and remained there forever. And all this time he becomes more firmly convinced that, as Chekhov put it, one must "hurry to do good": not Good with a capital "G" but the best and simplest human deeds dictated by a feeling of comradeship toward all one's fellows: to Callie; to Nick, Willard's son, who has become Henry's son; to Simon Bale, the hotel worker, a fanatic sectarian who destroyed his own family and, left without a roof over his head, found shelter under Henry's roof, only to bring dissension and discord into the newly-forming family with his fanatic maximalism; and to Willard, who has returned home with nothing, after a car accident; as Fate would have it he is run down by the very technology that he worshipped.

Gardner's book shows us an America that is seldom seen in other American novels: remote, provincial America, where life hardly differs from that of the founding fathers. It is a land which has preserved the magic powers of naive belief, customs and myths that are the basis of the people's consciousness rather than the mystification of a new artificial mythology of the "electronic age", the "mass society", and the "consumer's civilization". To the hero of this novel, this America which is so familiar, where he has spent his whole life, seems imperishable and beyond human understanding. He half-consciously perceives the uncontrollable, elemental force of an essentially irrational "stream" to which he himself belongs; he comprehends the threat to his ethical way of life which he has set right with great difficulty. For the Soames family is the result of the conscious efforts, and to some degree the self-constraint, of the two people who created it, and life will not bear artificiality or constraint. Life is complex, mysterious, and uncontrollable. Thus Loomis is right when he tells Henry: "You take on a responsibility like that, and you say to yourself you'll move heaven and

earth to protect the kid you love, or the woman, or whoever it happens to be, but the minute you say it you're forgetting something. . . . You can't."

Feeling that Loomis is basically right, Henry is always hesitating between hope and disbelief, between a desire to incorporate the law of goodness that he professes into life and thereby conquer its chaos, and the sense that all his efforts are doomed, that catastrophe is inevitable.

Simon's life ends in catastrophe, for he has attempted to constrain life in lifeless postulates in which he selflessly believes. Catastrophe lies in wait for Willard who did not wish to realize the many facets and incomprehensibility of life and who has exchanged its riches for a wretched utilitarianism. And catastrophe stands at the threshold of Henry's home too, for he has also struggled with life's ungovernable chaos, has harmonized and softened it with his altruism and faith in good. But his faith is too naive and his altruism too rational, side-stepping the rough edges of reality and striving to ignore its harsh, cruel essence.

The complex spiritual life of Gardner's hero leads to the revelation of this essence. Gradually he acknowledges this, and his acknowledgement is the principle idea of the book; it has a bright rather than a tragic ring. For catastrophe only threatens Henry. It never crosses his threshold. "You have to have faith," says Callie. She says this in passing during a conversation about why the earth has such a meagre yield despite all the methods to improve cultivation; her remark resolves a moral conflict no less important than other philosophical questions and problems of world outlook raised in the novel. She is speaking, not of a blind faith in an ideal removed from reality that can be affirmed only by constraining life itself, but of a deep, sober, wise faith. That faith in the great power of good, born of severe trials, gives Gardner's hero peace of mind and a sense of a full life that has found its realization on the threshold of death.

A. Zverev

TOM WOLFE AND THE "NEW JOURNALISM"*

Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, with an Anthology, edited by Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, Harper & Row Publishers, N. Y., 1973, 394 pp.

Charles C. Flippen, *Liberating the Media. The New Journalism*, Aeropolis Books, Ltd., Washington D. C., 1974.

The anthology *The New Journalism* (1973) reviews a polemic engendered by that phenomenon which arose in the atmosphere of the flurry of American publicistic writings in the mid-sixties. Both the bestsellers of those years and a series of essays bear witness of fundamental changes in that sphere of American culture.

It was precisely at that time that some talented journalists, among them Tom Wolfe, suddenly sensed that one could no longer write in the old way. Wolfe stated his point of view in the voluminous essay "Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore", published in *Esquire*. Later this essay was the basis for his introduction to the anthology *The New Journalism*.

Writes Wolfe: "...By the Sixties, about the time I come to New York, the most serious, ambitious and, presumably, talented novelists had abandoned the richest terrain of the novel; namely, society, the social tableau, manners and morals, the whole business of 'the way we live now', in Trollope's phrase" (p. 29). "...So the novelists has been kind enough to leave behind for our boys quite a nice little body of material: the whole of American

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society, in effect" (p. 31). The "new journalists" use those artistic devices which brought fame to the great realists of the past: Henry Fielding, Tobias George Smollett, Honoré de Balzac, and Nikolai Gogol. The four main devices, according to Wolfe, are "scene-by-scene construction", which led to the rebirth and perfection of the art of reportage; direct participation in the narrated events and the so-called "third-person point of view"; scrupulous rendering of dialogue; and finally, a genius for describing everyday details (as developed by Balzac). As for the rest, affirms Wolfe, the new journalists have no canons: "For the gluttonous Goths there is still only the outlaw's rule regarding technique: take, use, improvise." Their basic sources are the novel and documentary prose. Wolfe comes to the following conclusions: in an era characterized by unprecedented changes in subjects that have been the province of the novel since time immemorial—society, mores and morality, the first serious literary trend in the last fifty years has developed on the pages of popular journals. Its representatives, most of whom are journalists, the "lumpenproletarians" of the literary world, take up the standard of social realism abandoned by novelists of the forties and fifties; taken as a whole their writings constitute a vivid historical novel about America in the stormy 60s. Wolfe's main goal was to show that the "new journalism" could not be overlooked as a literary phenomenon.

Before discussing the theoretical aspects of Tom Wolfe's manifesto (although the practitioners of the "new journalism" are far from agreement on questions of principle), we will comment on his anthology which includes the work of twenty writers who in Wolfe's opinion are the most typical and talented representatives of this trend.

Curiously enough, Wolfe confesses that he and Johnson were carried away by a desire to show formal devices and only at the conclusion of the work turned their attention to the thematics of the selected material; they had to admit that the anthology reflected the dominants

of American social consciousness of these years: the war, domestic policies, the lives of "stars" of American culture, sports, the underworld, the work of the police. The explosion of a young counter-culture is a major theme in the collection, as exemplified in Richard Goldstein's essay "Gear", Terry Southern's "Red Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes", Tom Wolfe's "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test", and Robert Christgau's "Beth Ann and Macrobioticism", among others. Particularly noteworthy are Hunter S. Thompson's essay "The Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gang", and Joe Eszterhas' "Charlie Simpson's Apocalypse". Both conform to the standards of first-class social research. Three articles deal with the American army's activities in Vietnam. Combining dialogue between American soldiers with laconic sketches of military life, Michael Herr recreates the unbearable psychological atmosphere of life in the trenches. Nicholas Tomalin's "The General Goes Zapping Charlie Cong" is almost entirely built around dialogue. John Sack used numerous interviews with American soldiers to show the war as they saw it.

Some of the materials included in the anthology deal with events of America's internal political life. Two sections were excerpted from the bestsellers *Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer and *The Selling of the President* by Joe McGinnis. Describing Martin Luther King's funeral, Garry Wills strives to convey the Southern psychology. Also of interest are two subtle character sketches by Tom Wolfe, one about the work of an official in an employment agency and the other about Leonard Bernstein's house parties with representatives of the "New Left" and the Black Panthers among the guests.

Attempting to recreate not simply facts, but what Maxim Gorky termed "the quintessence of facts", the "new journalists" claim that their work combines both the authenticity of a document and the artistic generalization. Generally such claims have been reserved for eminent publicists who have made a name for themselves in fiction, writers like Capote, Mailer, and Baldwin.

Already in mid-1966, Dan Wakefield's essay "The Personal Voice and the Impersonal Eye" captures the essence of this phenomenon. Wakefield notes that the crux of the problem does not lie in terminological disputes as to whether reportage is "paraviewing" or "fictional reviewing", about the "nonfiction novel", "plain journalism" and "parajournalism". Wakefield denies that Capote, by proclaiming novelistic reportage as "the great unexplored art form of the future", opened a new era in American journalism with *In Cold Blood*.

Capote creates the illusion of objectivity by distancing himself from his subject. He reflects a phase where a writer is fascinated by documentation itself, by the task of depicting a person through facts, and the context of his life. Some of the "new journalists" strove, like Capote, to adhere to facts. Others, imitating Mailer, wrote "history as a novel".

But even for Mailer, "factoids"—hybrids of fact and fantasy—proved dangerous. When he decided to let facts about the life of Marilyn Monroe that were perhaps too well-known pass through the prism of his fantasy, his compatriots refused to dissect the beloved myth. But the "new journalists" are indebted to none other than Mailer for attaining historical pathos. They set themselves the task of raising nonfiction to the level of a work of art, of revealing the essence of the epoch in everyday phenomena. And this is the task of an artist.

Each of the essays included in this anthology might be characterized as a story or novella based on documentary material. But the "new journalists" do not write fiction in the true sense of the word. Like Dos Passos, they create vivid sketches rather than full-blooded characters.

One can find a successful combination of the social and the individual in contemporary American literature, although this is not often the case. It would be sufficient to recall Joyce Carol Oates' stories about young people. Oates successfully depicts both cross-sections of society and unique characters. However, the "new journalism" does have an advantage. Communicating impressions of

the facts of American history, "new journalists" put extraordinarily strong emphasis on their common significance for both direct participants and observers. From this perspective one could draw parallels not only between the "new journalists" and the social realists of the thirties, but between them and the renowned muckrakers as well; no one else so scrupulously exposes the other side of the counter-culture as do the "new journalists".

Then what is this new centaur, born of the traditional novel and documentary prose, that has come into the world during the period of the flowering of "mass culture"? Neither Tom Wolfe nor anyone else for that matter is about to insist that this is an utterly new phenomenon. Scholars can show clear examples of similar syntheses in both world and American literature. The tradition existed in hoary antiquity, as Soviet literary critic P. Palievsky shows in the discussion of documentary writing in the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura* (Foreign Literature). But such a parallel only gives a general view and ignores specific historical and aesthetic aspects.

The "new journalism" is a particularly American form of documentary writing with its own historical and aesthetic features. These specific features also affect the facts themselves, artfully etched by the representatives of this trend. The facts are imbued with the dynamism, dramatic effect and epic quality that are lacking, at times, in the fiction of the last decade. Frequently it provided future readers with splendid models of "anatomical dissection" of the souls of their contemporaries. At the same time one notes that at the close of the stormy sixties the brightest lights of "new journalism", Baldwin and Mailer, returned to fiction as the most capacious, profound and all-embracing form of realism.

The "new journalism's" orientation to a wide audience raised the level of American publicistic writing and made it comparable with prose fiction. Before the advent of the "new journalists" the formal devices of realism were used with great success in popular literature or the so-called "paraliterature" (by writers like Arthur Hailey).

But only the "new journalists" looked back to realism as a method of reflecting reality and this immediately guaranteed them success.

But the "new journalism" was born less than ten years ago; its representatives are people of widely divergent styles, outlooks and literary gifts. It is therefore difficult at this point to fully accept the view of Tom Wolfe and the Soviet critic M. Turovskaya that this trend is an essential stage in the development of contemporary realism and that journalism is not mimicking the novel, but rather the novel is mimicking journalism. Doubtless the new journalism is a major event in contemporary American "mass culture" and is directly related to the democratic, increasingly realistic tendencies of the sixties. Thus both the anthology and its theoretical part are interesting in many respects.

One must note in passing, however, that in discussing the relation of this trend to the general development of contemporary American literature, Wolfe skims over one of its most essential aspects. In the sixties the "mass media" was transformed into a news industry whose rapid growth compelled traditional sources of information, above all the publishing industry, to re-organize.

In this respect Charles Flippen's collection *Liberating the Media. The New Journalism*, published in 1974, deserves serious attention. This book approaches the problem from the opposite perspective. In his preface, Flippen characterizes that sphere of contemporary American publicistic writing represented in Wolfe's and Johnson's anthology (he calls it "literary journalism") as part of the trend of "new journalism". Giving the floor to prominent American journalists working in various areas of the "mass media", Charles Flippen strives not only to understand the term "new journalism"—which is so broad that it scarcely yields to an unequivocal definition—but to reveal this trend's relation to tendencies characteristic of the development of a single system incorporating the American "mass media".

T. Rotenberg

JONATHAN LIVINGSTON SEAGULL*

Richard Bach, *Gonathan Livingston Seagull*, N.Y., Makmillan, 1970, 93 pp.

Ralph Bakshi's avant-garde film *Heavy Traffic* contains a stream of quotations from various hit movies, including parodies and flashbacks of *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Godfather*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and clips of the Rolling Stones and other celebrities; in their midst we catch a glimpse of a seagull silhouetted against the sun.

Jonathan Livingston Seagull is still on people's minds; he hasn't been forgotten; he still continues his strange flight. . . .

There is no more difficult and thankless a job than trying to predict what films and books will be successful, and nothing could be simpler than explaining that success after the fact. But I find myself somewhat hard put to explain the truly phenomenal triumph of Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, which came out as a separate book toward the end of 1970. A meticulous examination of *Jonathan*—the jacket, the printing, the text—as a phenomenon of “mass culture”, employing the most effective structural methods, may explain why people read the book, but not why they want to read it. This fable, this philosophical tale, or better yet, this poem in prose, is addressed to the “select few” who are more interested in

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the selfless striving for perfection of flight, than in the daily fight over fish-heads. But it appears that those "select few" form a large group, a very large group. Bach's work, which appears to be so unlike anything that usually arouses the interest of the public, touches on the most varied phenomena which for different reasons have become the focal concerns of society. By outlining some of these areas, we might better be able to understand why this work, so unlike the common run of popular literature, has achieved such success.

The first of these themes, strange as it may seem, is what I would term "animal stories".

Until very recently man has perceived himself as separate from nature and proceeded on the assumption that nature is to be quickly and fundamentally altered; now that the concept of ecology has arisen he has been trying once again to feel himself a part of nature and to approach its mysteries. This, more than any other, is the point where science has closed ranks with literature, where ethology, the study of animal behavior, has become popular reading with virtually no change in the scientific language of description. Yesterday's romanticization of single combat with nature has been replaced by impassioned pleas for unity with nature. The feats of the hunter have been replaced by the feats of the natural scientist trying to save rare animal species; people are shooting with cameras instead of rifles; virtually all illustrated magazines publish photo essays on the flora and fauna of various lands. To say nothing of the marvellous works of Gerald Durrell, Joy Adamson, Bernhard Grzimek and others, works that are as popular as fiction.

All of this, of course, has little to do with Jonathan who is mastering aerobatics and achieves immortality. But now that ethology, bionics and animal psychology have become the order of the day, it is only natural that John Cunningham Lilly's research should immediately be followed by Leo Szilard's science fiction novel *The Voice of Dolphins*, or that the author of *The Hellstrom Chronicle*, a popular scientific film on insect life, should

not be satisfied by a simple demonstration of surprising wildlife footage, but should strive to make his film a sort of unique, sinister anti-utopia, contrasting the irrationality of human civilization with the "super-rationality" of ant and bee "civilizations".

Bach's philosophical tale enters wholly into the age-old realm of allegory. But it is scarcely coincidental that the publishers and the author rejected the initial illustrations drawn for *Jonathan*, regarding them as too "literary". It is scarcely coincidental that they turned instead to the "documentary" genre of photography. The authenticity of these pictures of land, sea, sky and the flight of seagulls not only seems in harmony with the fable; it also gives an aura of reality to the story of this exceptional seagull. It is akin to the Voice which supposedly communicated the story to Richard Bach, conveying that strange duality of impression, on the border between the possible and impossible, which could hardly assume the status of "animal psychology".

It should be noted that this conjunction of photography and fable does not exhaust *Jonathan's* relations to the documentalism modern man has grown so accustomed to; the illusion of reality does not depend solely on the link between the legendary structure of the plot and the real texture of the photographs. The story itself is arranged as a documentary account.

The description of Jonathan's training, the detailed and specialized description of flight techniques and aerobatics, is akin to "new journalism" reportage. And if the fable proceeds along a tangent toward the realm of "animal psychology", it is even more closely connected with Bach's speciality, which bears the same name as the magazine for which his work was originally intended—*Flying*.

One need hardly remind the reader of the strides made by aviation within our memory—from breaking the sound barrier to space travel—to explain the fascinating and polemical meaning of the eternal question "Why?" or of the selfless striving for perfection.

But this little book published by Macmillan with its glossy blue cover, where we find as many lines of type as there are clouds, light and fog and the flights of seagulls (all these things are reproduced in full in any cheap, pocket edition)—this little book forces us to recall another popular, contemporary name, one completely different: the name of Marshall McLuhan. Modern printing techniques, of course, cannot convey the sound of the wind, the cries of seagulls fighting over fish-heads, the rustle of wings or the silence of Jonathan's sky; a book, after all, is a book, and not a television screen, and *Jonathan* belongs, in McLuhan's words, to the pre-television "Gutenberg Galaxy"; but working within the limits of contemporary printing techniques, Macmillan did everything it possibly could to produce a book addressed not only to the mind, but to the whole aggregate of feelings experienced by a man living in the television era. It is only natural, therefore, that the book should be described in terms of television: *Jonathan* doesn't attract, it "involves".

The easiest, most natural way of explaining *Jonathan*'s success would be through "minus-factors", as the advocates of the structural method would say. And in fact, against the background of increasing violence, legalized pornography and gross consumerism, all of which have become the *modus vivendi* of "mass culture" in our day, the selfless striving of a strange seagull called Jonathan Livingston to strike out alone and achieve perfection becomes in some sense a profession of faith. The gospel-like structure of the plot is obvious: seclusion and election, death and resurrection. Just as obvious is the conscious modification of the plot, the process of *Verfremdungseffekt* by transferring it into another, allegorical reality. Both these devices—recurring gospel motifs and the changes effected in their form—show that *Jonathan*, unique both in genre and subject, belongs to a much broader range of phenomena on all levels of Western culture known as the neo-romantic wave.

If "minus-factors" did not directly bring *Jonathan* to life, they at least made it a commercial success and

drew the attention of the public to it: what was old-fashioned became not only fashionable, but modern as well.

As any observer can see, however, the neo-romantic wave has, on the one hand, an altogether definite, immutable existence, while on the other hand its component elements and values are altogether indefinite, unequal and unlike each other.

That is why in this neo-romantic, sentimental wave, which has once again discovered the charm—seasoned with nostalgia and a touch of irony—of discredited feelings of kindness and simple truths, *Jonathan* can exist on its own without resembling anything else. It goes without saying that behind these dissimilar quests for a lost paradise one can discern certain social processes, including the crisis in the official church, which for many has ceased being the bearer and symbol of Christian ideals. The paradox lies in the fact that the crisis of the Christian church coincided with increasing spiritual hunger and, in this connection, with the modernization of certain Christian ideals in various youth movements. The “six-winged seraphim”, like many other things in the neo-romantic wave, appeared in remade, stylized clothing. The return to evangelical precepts took place, not in the church, but on the street and in the theatre, in the fancy terms of mass culture, in pop art.

Jesus Christ Superstar embodies this strange situation of youth returning joyfully to the Christian legend in the carnival form of a mass spectacle. Against the background and in the shadow of *Jesus Christ Superstar* the mass “Jonathan” epidemic ceases being a caprice of fortune or something akin to Huckleberry Finn’s foolish “royal giraffe”, representing instead a continuation of the process of adaptation which traditional human values undergo.

In the neo-romantic wave there is on all levels an obvious and irreversible burning aftertaste of unsurmounted disappointment, and, consequently, of irony. The only way it knows how to proceed is by going back-

wards. Its return to morality lacks persistence and urgency, and therefore it prefers popular sentimentalism to cruel realism. Even the sermonic genre of *Jonathan* does not save it from the necessity of a defensive irony. The repetition of well-known gospel situations is salvaged from unbearable banality by parody and self-parody.

The outlines of the traditional gospel story are also renovated and retouched in the story of this unusual seagull by elements of Buddhism, and particularly Zen Buddhism. But the grafting of the East onto the West, of certain essential propositions of Buddhism onto the trunk of Christian culture, is also a remarkable feature of youth's rebellion against the pragmatism of a consumer society. And the lonely seagull, trying so hard and so selflessly to achieve perfection, to surmount the barriers of time, space and death, does not, on second thought, seem to be so alone.

The marvellous fable of Jonathan Livingston Seagull reveals certain traits that characterize the neo-romantic wave, which cannot combine individual splashes varying tremendously in size to form a powerful ninth wave, for from the start idealism has been undermined and darkened by the lessons of history and the reality surrounding it. It represents something akin to illusion which recognizes its illusiveness.

Jonathan's bestseller status may seem to be an accidental, self-sufficient phenomenon precisely because it was destined to ride on the crest of a wave whose underlying mass was left unnoticed.

The genre of the fable has apparently proved to be a convenient formula capable of incorporating certain moods and quests of Western youth and their disillusionment in the bourgeois order of things.

M. Turovskaya

THE APOCALYPTIC FANTASIES OF ALLEN DRURY*

Allen Drury, *Come Nineveh, Come Tyre. The Presidency of Edward M. Jason*, Garden City, N. Y., 1973, 481 pp.

... A chain of mysterious coincidences, including a political assassination, opens the doors of the Oval Office for Governor Edward Jason. Supported by Left-wing forces opposed to the military, the new president makes sweeping changes in American foreign policy. Submarine flotillas are reduced; warships are called back to port; spy-satellites are no longer launched into orbit; a reduction in the armed forces is announced; the US refuses to support puppet regimes. What will Moscow say to this? What is the future of detente? Will mankind's hopes for a lasting peace based on mutual trust be justified?

Allen Drury's book contends that these are empty, pitiful illusions. Detente leads to one-sided disarmament, says Drury, following the lead of certain generals and other representatives of the military-industrial complex by drawing for the American reader a nightmarish picture of a sudden alteration in the balance of power. Following the recall of the American fleet, strategic straits fall into foreign hands and "the enemy" makes parachute landings at key points around the globe. New demands continue to be made and, fearing the possible outbreak of a third world war, President Jason yields, the fatal step

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is taken and the policy of detente becomes the policy of capitulation.

For Drury, it is the American liberals who have precipitated this situation. He complains that leading American intellectual and cultural figures have been preoccupied with accusing America of sinister goals and plans, of hypocrisy, imperialism, racism, indifference and cruelty. The entire generation that chose Jason as their representative has been brought up on such denunciations. The dragon's teeth sown in the radical sixties bear fruit. Having lost their immunity to the enticing ideas of the critics of capitalism, young idealists become the obedient instruments of the "evil geniuses" of America, among them Senator Fred van Ackerman who sets the country on a catastrophic course to further his own egoistic interests.

Apart from the USSR, there is still another archenemy of America in Drury's eyes: peace-loving forces within the country itself. Developing the theme of a domestic and foreign political struggle, Drury attempts to frighten us with a fascist threat from the left who apparently use the slogans of disarmament and detente for demagogic purposes.

Although this work is designated on the title page as a novel, it will not stand up under the most indulgent criticism from an artistic standpoint. We are faced here with a frankly political tract based entirely on arbitrary assumptions. The discrepancies between Drury's world and the realities of contemporary international relations can literally be seen on every page. The section dealing with a summit conference in Moscow is particularly revealing. There are concrete historical analogies for this event and yet it is presented from a distorted political perspective.

For all their stiltedness and incongruities, works like those of Drury cannot be overlooked in the ideological struggle for the minds and hearts of Americans. Writers like Allen Drury or Helen MacInnes, master of the anti-communist spy novel, like the jaundiced Lavr Divomlikov, and the "king of conformist literature" Herman Wouk promote ideas which are above all harmful to the

majority of the American people. Even today from time to time one hears militant senators urging the American people to focus their attention on the economic and political conflicts that remain and exhorting them not to let diplomatic histrionics confuse them.

Nevertheless real literature, by its very nature, continues to rebel against those who would inspire renewed national and ideological animosities; and the author of *Come Nineveh*, *Come Tyre* is guilty of precisely this crime against humanity. A writer's civic activism derives directly from his artistic conscience. Emile Zola, Anatole France, the participants in the congresses for the protection of culture from fascism in the thirties and the great majority of American writers during the war in Vietnam all set their moral authority and names on the scales of history. The genre of the political novel covers works which are the spiritual antipodes of Drury's novel. In his book *On Instructions of My Government* (1971) Pierre Salinger, former press secretary to President Kennedy, speaks of the perils of international crises and reiterates the necessity of friendship and co-operation between the USSR and the US so as to remove the threat of nuclear war.

Humanistic ideas pervade the best works of many American poets and prosaists, among them Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg and Ernest Hemingway. This remarkable tradition, which has many parallels in Russian literature, is being developed today by such distinctive and different artists as James Baldwin, Joyce Carol Oates, John Gardner, Joseph Heller. The profound humanism inherent in their works is in sharp contrast to the apocalyptic visions of Allen Drury who appears to have panicked in the face of time's inexorable stride.

A. Mulyarchik

AWAKENING*

James Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, Lnd., 1974, 230 pp.

In recent years the public somehow forgot that James Baldwin is a novelist. The author came out with one publicistic book after another, delving relentlessly into the hottest, most sensitive areas of contemporary American life. The artistic image proved insufficient, even a hindrance of sorts. The writer armed himself with documents alone, with direct testimony, angry words of accusation.

If Beale Street Could Talk marks a change in this trend, a return to belles lettres. But it is not merely a return, for Baldwin's earlier fiction is not written in the same way as this new novella. A gentle melody now sounds in his prose, a plaintive poetic note. No American author since J. D. Salinger has so forcefully expressed lyrical emotion as Baldwin does in *Beale Street*. Like all of Baldwin's works, regardless of genre, the book contains biting social commentary.

The dark-skinned young sculptor Fonny is thrown into prison on a trumped-up charge: the rape of a Puerto Rican girl. This accusation, which has many parallels in

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reality, lies at the basis of the novella's plot. If one considers books with analogous plots, it is not difficult to imagine how the conflict could have developed: cruel, almost insane curses directed at "white America", a sermon praising Black Power and Black Supremacy. For these themes are more or less characteristic for the development of black American literature in the 60s and one has only to glance at a few chapters of his most recent publicistic book *No Name in the Street* to see that Baldwin has also been affected by this trend. There is indisputable historical and psychological justification for such a position; discrimination is a painful problem of long standing. But it is clear that at one point this position began to fetter the writer's creative imagination and narrow the scope of his vision.

It is to be expected that Baldwin's new book is full of rage, passion, fury and despair. Fonny often blurts out recriminations against "this democratic hell", this "nation of pigs and murderers". Similar notes of blunt menace sound throughout the book. And yet its content and style are not defined by these notes. Fonny is more often than not a reflected character rather than a direct participant in events; the narrator is his fiancée Clementine or, as she was nicknamed in childhood, Tish. Her timid, trusting voice, gradually gathering strength but steadfastly retaining human warmth, dominates the story. It reflects the pensive melodies of "the blues", the solemn intonations of the Bible, a protest against a hostile environment, and a firm resolution to act.

Through a polyphonic wealth of melodies, the author significantly extends the thematic scope of this novella, so small and yet so rich in content. It cannot be reduced to a description of a peripeteia of love, of remarkably strong emotion which can withstand any trial (somehow this recalls motifs in *West Side Story*); nor does it boil down to a strictly Negro problem. Both the author's predilections and his antipathies are clearly evident. For example, these surface with particular emotional power when Bell, the policeman whose conscience is already

burdened with the murder of a Negro, enters the narrative. For Bell throws Fonny into prison and fabricates false evidence. The half-animal image of the police officer reflects all qualities that are hateful to the writer: blind cruelty, the firm conviction that the white race is superior. But despite the psychological authenticity of this figure, there is nothing new in it. The new development for Baldwin lies in the fact that despite his blood kinship with people whose skin is black, this color ceases to be an unconditional sign of human virtue for him. There is a powerful frankness in the image of Fonny's mother, Mrs. Hunt, whose religious bigotry triumphs over her natural maternal feelings. Upon discovering that Fonny's and Tish's expected child was "conceived in sin", she is ready to believe the monstrous accusation against her son. The black community itself loses its unimpeachable moral purity; Beale Street, one of Harlem's by-streets, is often the scene of drunken debauches, throat-slashings and muggings. Likewise, white skin loses its unfailingly ominous, hostile connotations. Lawyer Arnold Hayward wants to help Fonny get out of prison for reasons of conscience rather than a desire to earn a high fee for his services.

This re-evaluation of ideas that had seemed firmly entrenched results, at times, in surprising artistic effects. Suddenly one senses a certain similarity to Faulkner, although this may be unconscious. Tish's mother Sharon, a steadfastly good and long-suffering woman, is reminiscent of Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*; the sudden discourse on time also brings Faulkner to mind. The rhythms and even the lexicon of some segments of Baldwin's prose are similar to those of Faulkner. There was a time when Baldwin, then just beginning his literary career, made an outraged attack on Faulkner, condemning, with some justice, his conservative views on the Negro problem. This artistic rehabilitation of Faulkner is telling. It reflects Baldwin's new point of reference. The author of *The Sound and the Fury*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* generally treats the Negro question from the perspective of mankind as a whole; now Baldwin also

recognizes that his former artistic framework was too narrow.

This is the artist's main triumph. He has rid himself of the ideas of Black Revolution and neo-Pan-Africanism and replaced them with something new: the everyday life of the street, the pain and poverty of the black block grow here to the summit of human brotherhood, to a union of the simple working people. Beale Street speaks, stirs, and unites in a common cause, the struggle for justice. The residents are forced to keep silent; they are murdered and persecuted. But constant oppression only inspires greater resistance. The residents are no paragons although some inspire the reader's and author's trust: Fonny's father Frank Hunt commits forgery and fraud to get enough money to bail out his son. But they are alive with an inner steadfastness and have core of humanity that forces them to make great sacrifices to the very end. At times the core can crack leading to the unrelievable moral trauma of Fonny's friend Daniel, a broken, jaded man, or to suicide, as in the case of Fonny's father, who cannot stand the grief and trials. But here the threads are restored and reconnected, extended into new areas of reality. There is good reason for the action to be shifted from Harlem to the poverty-stricken Puerto Rican *favella*, when the unbending Sharon sets out to find the girl who identified Fonny as her assailant. Her mission is unsuccessful. Victoria refuses to retract her testimony, fearing to resurrect the terrible events of the past. But perhaps the failure is not all that important. More essential is the unmistakable sense of community between the unfortunates of the world that is communicated to the reader upon exposure of life in the *favella*. Here, as on Beale Street, is a ghetto, dirt, poverty and at the same time light; cruel reality and poetry:

"The blue sky above, and the bright sun, the blue sea, here, the garbage dump, there. It takes a moment to realize that the garbage dump *is* the *favella*. Houses are built on it—dwellings; some on stilts, as though attempting to rise above the dung-heap. Some have corrugated

metal roofs, some have windows. All have children." The contrast may be a bit too straightforward, but this is understandable. Baldwin felt the need to put the stamp of hope on this plastic, perceptible image of dirt, poverty and light, hope in spite of everything. For this is nothing more than hope. Although Fonny manages to get out of prison and we hear the demanding cry of Tish's child in the finale, the heroes' future is far from cloudless. They will have to fight against one obstacle after another and no one can predict the sacrifices that will be demanded by the struggle. But it cannot be stopped. People learn the art of struggling and the struggle, be it ever so cruel, teaches them in turn. And once again one recalls the visible changes in Baldwin's work. A short time ago Tish's path from ignorance and artlessness, from her job as a salesgirl in a perfumer's shop to a realization of her active role in life, of her responsibility could have been diverted toward a national, "Blackness" coming of age. In *Beale Street* this is not the case. The heroine's awakened national consciousness is also the stirring of her civic, class consciousness, the growing sense of a bond not only with people of the same color, but with everyone who, like herself, has been deprived of his right to human happiness in this life. For this reason the allusion to a kinship between Tish and the Puerto Rican Victoria, who has caused her unhappiness, seems unexpected. But it is only an apparent paradox, for an unbelievably difficult existence has driven Victoria to this lie.

Naturally one should not hurry to draw conclusions. Living writers have a habit of going their own way and disproving the speculative prognoses of critics. But it is clear enough that Baldwin has written a first-rate book marking out artistic pathways which, considering the writer's inexhaustible talent, promise to lead to serious artistic triumphs.

N. Anastasyev

TODAY ABOUT THE PAST*

Gore Vidal, *Burr*, N. Y., Random house, 1973, 430 pp.

Gore Vidal's *Burr* made the bestseller lists of 1974 for thirty-nine weeks running. The Soviet reader is already well acquainted with Vidal through his biting political novel *Washington, D. C.* The author of three collections of publicistic articles, four plays, and some thirteen novels, he once again turns his attention to the political problems of his country, having selected one of the most exciting periods of American history, the years of revolution. The narrative has many levels. Vidal the novelist tells about events of two centuries ago, while Vidal the publicist emphasizes problems of American history that have much in common with present-day issues. Both English and American reviewers have remarked upon the resemblance between Vidal's General Washington and General Eisenhower; some of President Jefferson's actions carry obvious overtones of the Watergate affair. The merciless portrait of William de la Touche Clancey, in the opinion of people who are privy to the secrets of the literary wonderland, bears a suspicious likeness to William F. Buckley Jr., although Vidal affirms that William de la Touche Clancey could obviously be based on no one at all.

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“Why A Historical Novel,” asks Vidal in the afterword, “and not a history?” His answer is as follows: “To me, the attraction of the historical novel is that one can be as meticulous (or as careless) as the historian and yet reserve the right not only to rearrange events but, most important, to attribute motive—something the conscientious historian or biographer ought never do.”

We won’t argue here with Vidal’s views on historians and the historical novel, especially since he himself stipulates that they are subjective and makes no claims as to their absolute truth. But one cannot forget this subjectivity when reading *Burr*.

The authorial “I” is essentially absent from Vidal’s novel; the author makes no direct judgements on personalities and events of those years. In any case he attempts to convince us that this is so, concealing his presence by means of a twofold *Verfremdungseffekt*. The first level of the novel is the story of the third Vice-President Aaron Burr’s last three years against the background of the widespread power struggles that occurred during this period. For this Vidal introduces the fictional narrator Charlie Schuyler. This unprincipled young lawyer of 25, who is serving his apprenticeship with Burr, persuades the aged statesman to dictate his memoirs. Once he has recorded them, Schuyler (who turns out to be one of Burr’s many illegitimate children, which seems a very primitive way for Vidal to resolve certain formal problems) betrays him twice, each time receiving a suitable reward from those who want to compromise Van Buren, the candidate for President’s post.

The second level of the novel encompasses the period from April 20, 1775—the day of the Battle at Lexington where British and American soldiers first clashed on the battlefield—to September 14, 1836, when Burr expired at 2 p.m. Here Aaron Burr himself is the narrator.

But there is a third level to the novel, a subtext which, as we stated earlier, allows the author to make conjectures about contemporary American politics. Vidal, who for many years has been involved in politics and has a keen

sense for what is current, doubtless timed the publication of his novel for the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Through the figure of Aaron Burr, Vidal is able to depict the birth of the nation and its first fifty years with elegance and wit. But Burr functions in many ways in Vidal's novel; he is both a personality of extraordinary interest to an artist and a means of transporting us into the past, allowing us to touch upon fundamental contradictions of American political and social life at their inception. This permits Vidal to achieve his primary goal: to draw parallels, in the subtext, between past and present forms of political intrigue and stunts, and to show that these are not engendered by contemporary events but are deeply rooted in the historical past and organic to the bourgeois form of government. Gore Vidal writes about the weaknesses and inconsistencies of founding fathers whose images have not yet been polished up for presentation in historical readers. Although Vidal sets himself a more modest goal, being a talented artist he willy-nilly paints a splendid picture of the entire system. At the same time, with respect to certain concrete historical figures, there are occasions when we cannot agree with the author.

Burr's character, for example, has not been sufficiently revealed. This historical figure, who provides enviable dramatic material for an artist, remains on the sidelines of the novel. Vidal uses him insofar as this is necessary to penetrate the epoch and those political problems which seemed important to him (and with some justice). With regard to Jefferson, our objections are more a matter of principle; they are not based on any concrete historical inaccuracies.

The historic role of Thomas Jefferson in the American revolution is common knowledge. V. I. Lenin called it "one of those great, really liberating, really revolutionary wars". We recall that it was Jefferson who welcomed the rebellion of the poor farmers as a cleansing storm. Jefferson urged that the simple people be entrusted with self-rule at the same time that Hamilton declared: democracy

gives no man freedom. But we are also aware that Jefferson, that champion of human rights who opposed slavery, agreed to a compromise rather than insisting upon the abolition of slavery: he limited the importation of slaves but himself remained a slave owner. The Southerner Jefferson did not help the rebels on the Antilles. As a result of such contradictory views, Jefferson's image in the novel is somewhat lacking in proportion. In order to draw certain historical parallels, Vidal concentrates on Jefferson's less attractive qualities and thereby, perhaps involuntarily, distorts the historical personality of Jefferson, underestimating his services to the American people and revolution. True, Gore Vidal moulds the image of Jefferson from the words of Aaron Burr as communicated by Charlie Schuyler. Ostensibly he cannot be held responsible for the authenticity of their words. But essentially this novel is not only about Burr. It is no doubt tempting to show the intimate, mundane details of a great historical figure's life, but this is not the way that Jefferson's name went down in American and world history. Here, unfortunately, the gifted author of a book which deserves the attention of both readers and serious scholars of American literature has lost his sense of proportion.

The novel *Burr* belongs to the genre of historical-documentary prose, highly popular in the sixties and early seventies. William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, as well as many others fall into this category. As such the novel strikes us more as a publicistic meditation on history than a historical novel.

T. Golenpolsky

THE RICHEST LIFE*

Joseph Heller, *Something Happened*,
N. Y., 1974, 569 pp.

"We are a two-car family in a Class A suburb in Connecticut. Advertising people and the U.S. Census Bureau prepare statistics that include us in categories of human beings enjoying the richest life."

Heller derives statistical unity from a column of impersonal figures. Robert Slocum is a white American of Anglo-Saxon descent. This prominent official of a large company is occupied with the study of markets, supply and demand. He compels Americans to buy what they need and, primarily, to buy what they do not need.

He is married with three children, one of his sons is retarded.

A quarter of a century ago men like him were called travelling salesmen. Today as well he continues to travel and he still is a salesman, but the concept is a thing of the past. Slocum is as far from it as he is from his luckless patriarchal predecessor, the hero of Arthur Miller's play. Slocum doesn't knock at people's doors; at his disposal are all the wonders of technology—computers and the "mass media".

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He has all those material blessings that were only vain dreams for Miller's hero, but Slocum too is profoundly unhappy and so are those around him; at times he too is close to suicide.

His life unfolds in the present and the past. His youth is filled with fresh hope and confidence that something wonderful awaits him. But nothing comes to pass. The girl he loved kills herself. The world of youth disintegrates. And nothing remains of the seventeen-year-old boy. . . .

His whole being is immensely egoistic, egocentric. He tries to escape anything that is tragical or even sad, a staunch follower of the American advertising slogan: "Keep Smiling!" He expunges painful memories and thoughts and lives as though he did not have an idiot son, as though his mother had not died in a home for the aged where he had to force himself to visit her and felt neither love nor even pity.

He throws away the past so that it will not get in the way of his present. In both large and small matters his reckonings are based on considerations of self: "A vacuum cleaner that works well is more important to me than the atom bomb. . . .

"Green is more important to me than God . . . a transistor radio that is playing too loud is a larger catastrophe to me than the next Mexican earthquake. . . ."

This is the life credo of a man utterly isolated from the whole. Everything must please his "I".

When Slocum comes home from work, his wife immediately discovers with whom he has conversed, inasmuch as he imitates the speech of others and dissolves in other people's personalities.

"Who am I?" the hero asks himself, repeating the central question of contemporary American literature.

We read the long (too long) novel that is almost plotless and it turns out that "I" hardly exists. Not by chance can Slocum's son and daughter predict each rejoinder that their father will make—they are absolutely programmed.

Kurt Vonnegut, who had high praise for Heller's novel, called the author a mythmaker. Despite the numerous material signs in the novel, its reality is unsteady and dim. Of almost every episode, one can ask: "Did that really happen?"

Robert Slocum behaves like everyone else. He knows the rules of the game. You have to play golf whether you want to or not. You can't wear a jacket that is no longer fashionable. You can't wear brown boots. You can indulge in debauchery (and he does, like everyone else and more than many) but only if you observe the decorum of the faithful spouse. In all things you must follow the trends: so, at the beginning of the nineteen seventies even behind closed doors one cannot permit oneself to utter the word "nigger", what is more, it is advisable to hire at least one Negro or Jew. At home, one must use bad language and he forces his wife to do the same.

Heller's hero is the product of an inexorable, all-embracing process of standardization. For that reason he prospers, replacing a superior who could not keep up with the latest modes.

Slocum talks a lot. *Something Happened* is a novel-monologue. At the same time he feels caught in the grip of nonverbalty between his mother, who has lost her powers of speech, and his son, who cannot speak. But he truly lacks his own voice, he repeats the words of others. The inarticulateness is an incarnation of the absence of individual, distinctive features.

Slocum wants to transform his favorite son Bob into his likeness. At first the boy resists the pressures of family and school. He does not save, buys nothing for himself, and offers the money given to him by his parents to other boys. He does not want to be first at the expense of others; and for this reason classes in physical education inspire him with fear and disgust. His behavior is un-American. But the pressure takes its toll and toward the end of the book Bob Jr. jauntily clammers up a rope and stops giving away money, but he also stops loving his father.

In this protected family, the boy is pursued by nightmares both in his waking and sleeping hours. Heller's adult heroes also experience constant fear both at work and at home. All the bureaucrats fear each other. They fear, and not without reason, concrete evils: intrigue, slander, betrayal. From these concrete fears grows a general, irrational horror.

Critics classify Joseph Heller's first novel *Catch-22* as black humor. At first glance his second novel seems more traditional, closer to realism. But this is only the initial reaction. The book is constructed from highly plausible episodes in the life of one very typical American family. But as a whole, in its complex of human relationships, it is a phantasmagoria, a Kafkaesque world of the absurd.

There are innumerable dialogues which go on for pages and pages to the point of exhaustion; like words taken down in shorthand they are letter perfect but spiritually meaningless. One example of this are the conversations between Bob Slocum and his children.

The monotonous intonations of these dialogues are evidently designed to convey the monotony of existence itself, but the author lacks a sense of proportion and abuses the device.

Robert Slocum's home is no castle. It is no shelter, although the owner tries to isolate himself in a separate home with a separate study. He is unhappy in his isolation as well; he has nothing to do by himself for he has no individuality.

His family life becomes hell. Only the bed unites husband and wife. The novel is saturated with sexual motifs and sexual memories. The husband cheats on his wife. The wife drinks. The father is indifferent to his daughter. He has essentially rejected his mother. This cannot be concealed from his children or from himself.

The attitude of all four to the retarded son expresses the attitudes of totally normal people, only in a very limited, condensed form: Derek is of no use to anyone, he is a nuisance and a source of embarrassment. His father and

mother have suppressed their most elementary charitable feelings. They pay a heavy price.

Heller relentlessly exposes the deep, subconscious fears and desires (...let Derek die...) which flare up, if only once, in almost every human heart. Readers most often react to the novel as though it were about themselves.

The author is a master of all the subtleties of irony and humor. At times bitter, it is truly black.

Heller's novel is a story of success: at the end the family owns three cars, the hero has been promoted to an even higher position and receives even a higher salary. For Americans, a success story is almost folklore. But insofar as human relationships are concerned, the hero fails to the same degree as Miller's travelling salesman failed.

John W. Aldridge called Heller's book "the most important novel to appear in this country in at least a decade", obviously because it deals not only with one man and one family, but with society as a whole.

"Who am I?" the hero asks himself for the umpteenth time and answers: "I think I'm beginning to find out. I am a stick: I am a broken waterlogged branch floating with my own crowd in this one nation of ours, indivisible (unfortunately), under God, with liberty and justice for all who are speedy enough to seize them first and hog them away from the rest."

R. Orlova

SUPPLEMENT

PUBLICATIONS IN THE USSR

Works of about 700 writers of the USA, according to the preliminary data, were translated in the USSR during the period of the last 15 years (from 1960 to 1974). They were translated into 30 languages of the peoples of the USSR, the languages being as follows: Abkhazian (Ab), Armenian (Ar), Azerbaijani (Az), Bashkir (Bas), Buryat (Bur), Byelorussian (By), Chuvash (Ch), Estonian (Est), Georgian (Ge), Kabardian (Kab), Karakalpak (Kar), Kazakh (Kaz), Khakass (Kh), Kirghiz (Kir), Kumyk (Kum), Lettish (Let), Lithuanian (Lit), Mari (Ma), Moldavian (Mol), Ossetic (Os), Russian (Rus), Tajik (Taj), Tatar (Tat), Touvinian (Tou), Turkmen (Tur), Udmurt (Ud), Ukrainian (Ukr), Uzbek (Uz), Yakut (Yak).

In fact, it is impossible to count up all the works by these authors, published between 1960 and 1974, the editions being too numerous and of various types: some of the works were published in newspapers, and some as separate books.

In the subjoined checklist we have tried to demonstrate though schematically this situation on examples of works by more than 250 American writers.

- Albee E. 1964—Rus, Ukr; 1969—Rus; 1971—Est
 Algren N. 1961—Ukr
 Anderson P. 1966—Rus; 1967—Rus, Lit; 1970—Rus, Ukr
 Anderson Sh. 1961—Est; 1962—Ar, Ge; 1969—Ge, Lit; 1971—Lit;
 1972—Lit; 1973—Let; 1974—By
 Appel B. 1960—Rus
 Armstrong S. 1965—Rus; 1973—Rus; 1974—Rus
 Asch Sh. 1966—Rus
 Asimov I. 1962—Rus; 1964—Rus; 1965—Let, Lit, Rus, Est; 1966—
 Lit, Rus; 1967—Let, Lit, Rus; 1968—Az, Let, Tat, Est;
 1969—Az, Let, Lit, Rus, Est; 1970—Ar, Rus, Ukr; 1971—
 Rus; 1972—Rus, Tur; 1973—Lit, Rus, Est
 Auden W. H. 1969—Lit
 Bach R. D. 1973—Est; 1974—Rus
 Bailey Ch. 1964—Rus; 1966—Rus; 1967—Rus; 1971—Kaz; 1972—
 Est; 1973—Rus
 Bailey W. 1969—Rus; 1970—Rus
 Baldwin J. 1963—Rus; 1964—Rus; 1965—Rus; 1966—Rus; 1967—
 Rus; 1970—Lit, Rus; 1971—Rus; 1974—Rus
 Barthelme D. 1965—Ukr; 1972—Est
 Bellow S. 1961—Rus; 1968—Est; 1972—Est; 1973—Est
 Bennett L. 1968—Rus; 1969—Rus
 Berryman J. 1973—Rus
 Bessie A. C. 1961—Rus; 1964—Rus; 1965—Rus; 1966—Rus; 1967—
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 Bierce A. 1964—Rus; 1965—Est; 1966—Rus; 1967—Let, Rus; 1968—
 Ge; 1969—Rus; 1971—Rus; 1972—Let; 1973—Lit, Rus
 Bly R. 1966—Rus; 1967—Az; 1968—Rus; 1972—Ukr
 Bonosky Ph. 1960—Rus, Ukr; 1961—Lit, Rus; 1962—Ukr; 1963—By,
 Lit, Rus; 1964—Lit, Rus; 1965—Lit, Rus; 1966—Rus;
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 Bontemps A. 1962—Ukr; 1968—Rus
 Bourjaily B. 1972—Rus
 Bowles P. 1962—Ukr; 1967—Rus
 Bradbury R. 1960—Rus; 1961—Lit, Rus; 1962—Let, Rus, Ukr;
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 Bur, By, Lit, Rus, Ch, Ud; 1966—Let, Rus; 1967—Ar,
 Az, Ge, Kaz, Let, Lit, Mol, Rus; 1968—By, Lit, Rus, Ukr,
 Est; 1969—Ge, Kaz, Lit, Rus; 1969—Ukr, Est; 1970—Ar,
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 1974—Est; 1975—Rus
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 Buchwald A. 1962—Rus; 1963—Bas; 1964—Rus; 1966—Est, Rus, Taj;
 1967—Est, Kum, Let, Lit, Rus; 1968—Est, Rus; 1969—
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- Ukr; 1963—Rus; 1964—Rus; 1965—Ar, Est, Ge, Lit, Rus;
1966—Rus; 1967—Let, Lit, Rus; 1968—Let, Rus; 1969—
Lit, Rus; 1970—Ge, Let, Rus, Ukr; 1971—By, Est, Ge, Lit,
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1974—Est, Ge, Rus
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1974—Rus
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- Graham Sh. 1962—Rus
- Grau Sh. A. 1964—Rus; 1969—Rus; 1971—Lit; 1974—Rus
- Gregory D. 1969—Rus
- Griffin J. H. 1960—Bas
- Hailey A. 1971—Rus; 1972—Let, Rus, Ukr; 1973—Lit, Rus; 1974—
Ar, Let, Rus
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- Hammett D. 1970—Rus; 1972—Ukr
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 Longfellow H. 1960—Kaz, Est; 1961—Tat; 1964—Ge; 1965—Let; 1967—Ar; 1968—By; 1969—Ar, By; 1971—Az, Taj, Uz; 1972—Rus, Ukr; 1973—Taj, Uz; 1974—Rus
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 Macleish A. 1968—Rus; 1973—Rus
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 March W. 1961—Rus
 Marquand J. Ph. 1963—Rus; 1966—Rus
 Marquis D. 1972—Rus
 Marshall D. F. 1965—Rus
 Marzani C. 1960—Rus; 1963—Rus
 Masters E. L. 1962—Lit; 1964—Ge; 1967—Ge; 1969—Let
 Melville H. 1960—Rus; 1961—Rus; 1966—Est, Rus; 1967—Ge, Rus; 1968—Lit, Rus; 1969—Rus; 1970—Ge; 1971—Lit; 1973—Ge, Rus; 1974—Est
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 Metalious G. 1972—Let, Rus
 Milburn G. 1963—Ukr; 1965—Rus; 1971—Rus

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 O'Neill E. 1963—Rus; 1966—Rus; 1971—Rus; 1972—Est
 Parker D. 1960—Rus; 1963—Rus; 1967—Let; 1969—Lit; 1971—Est; 1972—Let, Rus
 Parks G. 1969—Est
 Patrick J. 1966—Rus
 Plath S. 1973—Rus; 1974—Rus
 Poe E. 1960—Let, Rus; 1962—Ge, Uz; 1965—Kaz; 1967—Kaz, Rus; 1968—Lit; 1969—Lit, Rus; 1970—Ge, Est; 1971—Ge, Mol; 1972—Rus, Ukr
 Pomroy W. 1965—Rus; 1968—Az, Rus; 1969—Rus; 1971—Ge
 Porter K. A. 1971—Let
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 Price R. 1967—Rus; 1971—Rus
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 Quin M. 1960—Lit; 1961—Ar; 1963—Ar, Rus; 1965—Ge, Kaz; 1966—Rus; 1967—Est; 1969—Ge, Rus; 1970—Az; 1971—Lit, Ukr; 1974—By
 Rechy J. 1970—Rus; 1973—Rus; 1975—Rus
 Reed J. 1960—Rus; 1961—Rus; 1962—Kaz, Kir, Rus; 1963—Rus; 1964—Est, Rus; 1965—Bas, Rus; 1966—Kaz, Mol; 1967—Az, Kar, Kaz, Let, Rus; 1968—Rus; 1969—Rus; 1970—Rus; 1971—Let; 1974—Rus
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 Robinson E. A. 1969—Ge; 1971—Rus
 Roethke T. 1972—Ukr; 1973—Rus
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 Roth Ph. 1971—Rus

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 Twain M. 1960—Az, By, Est, Ge, Kaz, Kar, Lit, Mol, Rus, Tur, Uz, Ch; 1961—Az, By, Ge, Let, Lit, Rus; 1962—Ar, Rus, Ukr, Uz; 1963—Bas, Est, Ge, Kab, Let, Rus, Ukr, Uz; 1964—Ar, Ge, Let, Lit, Mol, Rus; 1965—Ge, Kaz, Mol, Rus, Uz; 1966—Ar, Est, Ge, Rus; 1967—Kaz, Rus; 1968—By, Ge, Kaz, Let, Mol, Rus, Ukr; 1969—As, Kar, Kir, Rus; 1970—Ar, By, Est, Let, Rus, Tat; 1971—By, Mol, Rus; 1972—Ge, Rus, Ukr; 1973—By, Rus, Ukr; 1974—Ge, Mol, Rus
 Updike J. 1964—Est, Rus; 1965—Ge, Rus; 1966—Lit, Rus; 1967—Ar, Az, Lit, Rus, Ukr; 1968—Est, Let; 1969—Let, Ukr; 1970—Ar; 1972—Ge, Rus
 Vidal G. 1962—Rus; 1964—Rus; 1968—Rus; 1971—Let; 1972—Ar, Est; 1973—Lit
 Viereck P. R. 1961—Rus
 Vonnegut K. 1967—Rus; 1970—Rus; 1971—Est; 1972—Rus; 1973—Est, Let, Rus; 1974—Rus
 Warren R. P. 1968—Rus; 1969—Ukr; 1970—Lit; 1972—Let
 Weidman J. 1967—Rus
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 West E. 1973—Rus
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 Whitman W. 1961—Let; 1962—Est, Ge, Ukr; 1964—Rus; 1965—Ukr; 1966—Ge; 1967—Let, Mol; 1968—Kir; 1969—By, Ch, Est, Kaz, Lit, Mol, Rus, Ukr; 1970—Kir, Rus; 1972—Rus
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 Wormser R. E. 1966—Rus; 1968—Ar, Let; 1969—Ge
 Wright R. 1962—Rus; 1963—Est; 1967—Ge; 1968—Ge; 1971—Az, Ge; 1973—Est, Ge
 Yerby F. 1968—Az, Rus

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

Kovalev, Yury. Doctor of Philology, professor at Leningrad University. The author of more than a hundred essays on English and American literature. Kovalev has written studies on American romanticism and contemporary American prose. His books include: *Young America* (1971), and *Herman Melville and American Romanticism* (1972). In 1966, Yury Kovalev lectured at the Melbourne University and the National University of Australia; in 1975, he taught in the department of comparative literature at the San Francisco State University.

Koreneva, Maya. Candidate of Philology. Dissertation theme: *Modern American Dramaturgy: 1945-1970* (completed in 1975). Koreneva is a research fellow at the Gorky Institute of World Literature, affiliated with the USSR Academy of Sciences. She has published the following works on American dramaturgy: *Passions à la Tennessee Williams* (1970); *American Criticism on Post-war American Dramaturgy* (1969); the drama section in *Fundamental Trends in Contemporary American Literature* (1973). Dealing with other aspects of twentieth century American literature are her essays: "Ellen Glasgow and the Making of the School of the Southern Novel" (1970), "Literature and Young People", "The Science Fiction" and "The Literature of Socialist Realism" (1973).

Anastasyev, Nikolai. Was awarded the degree of Candidate of Philology for his dissertation *The Art of Thomas Wolfe and the Development of the American Novel of the Thirties* (1968). Member of the editorial staff of the journal *Voprosy Literatury*.

In the journal *Voprosy Literatury* and magazines *Inostrannaya Literatura*, *Novy Mir* and *Teatr*, he has published, among others, the

following articles: "Faust is not Dying" (On Thomas Wolfe); "William Faulkner: The Path to *Hamlet*"; "After the Legend" (On Ernest Hemingway); "Profiles of the American Theatre"; "Silhouettes of a False World" (On "mass culture"); "Does Literature Have a Future?"; "Journalism Today and Yesterday". In 1976, the publishing house Khudozhestvennaya Literatura will release his book *The Art of William Faulkner*.

Mulyarchik, Alexander. Senior lecturer at Moscow State University, senior research fellow at the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of the USA and Canada. His books include: *The Work of John Steinbeck* (1963), and *The American Novel of the Nineteen Twenties* (1968). Mulyarchik is one of the authors of the collective works of the Academy of Sciences Institute of World Literature: *Contemporary American Literary Criticism* (1969); *Fundamental Trends in Contemporary American Literature* (1973). He is also the author of essays: "American Literature of the Sixties" (1971); "The Recipe of the Literary Surrogate: Popular Fiction in the USA" (1972); "The Contemporary American Political Novel" (1974); "'Power Politics' in the Contemporary American Novel" (1974); "In Search of New Horizons: The American Novel of the Early Seventies" (1975).

Tugusheva, Maya. Candidate of Philology, literary critic, journalist. From 1958 to 1966, she worked in the international department of *Literaturnaya gazeta*. Since 1966, she has been a senior editor at Progress Publishers. Her dissertation (1972) deals with the work of Ring Lardner and the contemporary American short story. Maya Tugusheva has written essays, prefaces and reviews on the work of Robert Penn Warren, Flannery O'Connor, John Updike, James Baldwin, William Styron, John Killens, Erskine Caldwell, J. D. Salinger, Henry Miller, Mary McCarthy, R. Price, Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, Joyce Carol Oates, and a book: *The Contemporary American Short Story* (1972).

Zverev, Aleksei. Candidate of Philology. Dissertation theme: *The American Poetical Renaissance* (1972). Author of numerous reviews and essays on the work of Norman Mailer, Kurt Vonnegut, James Baldwin, John Gardner, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound and Denise Levertov. Compiler and author of the preface to the anthology *Contemporary American Poetry* (1975). Specializes in literature of the avant-garde. Author of research on the works of Jack London (1975).

Anikst, Alexander. Doctor of Art History (Institute of Art History), Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) University of Birmingham, England. Known for his studies of Shakespeare: *The Work*

of *Shakespeare* (1963), *Shakespeare: A Biography* (1964), *Shakespeare: The Playwright's Craft* (1974), and *Second Editions of Shakespeare* (1974). Works on the history and theory of drama include: *Dramatic Theory from Aristotle to Lessing* (1967) and *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to Chekhov* (1972). Alexander Anikst has written much on American studies. Among his articles are "An Essay on the Development of American Literature" in *Essays on Recent and Current American History* (USSR Academy of Sciences, 1960, Vol. I) and articles on the work of Walt Whitman, Theodore Dreiser, O. Henry and Eugene O'Neill (Anikst compiled the second Russian edition of O'Neill's plays and wrote the preface).

Gilenson, Boris. Senior lecturer in the literary department of Orekhovo-Zuyevo Pedagogical Institute. He wrote his Candidate dissertation in 1963 on Sinclair Lewis' work in the nineteen twenties; his doctoral dissertation was entitled *American Literature of the Thirties: The Role of Socialist Thought* (1975). Boris Gilenson has authored the following books: *He Saw the Birth of a New World: John Reed* (1962); *October in American Literature: 1917-1920* (1968); *American Literature in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: The Influence of Socialist Ideas on the Literary Process* (1969); *Sinclair Lewis' America* (1972); *American Literature of the Nineteen Thirties* (1974); *The Socialist Tradition in American Literature* (1975). B. Gilenson has also written on the "new criticism", Russo-American and Soviet-American literary contacts, on the work of Dreiser, Edward Bellamy and William Dean Howells. He has been published in many Soviet, English and American journals including: *Dickensian*, *English Journal*, *Hemingway Notes*, *American Studies*, *An International Newsletter*, and *Negro American Literature Forum*.

Zasursky, Yasen. Professor at Moscow State University, Doctor of Philology. From 1951 to 1953, scientific editor at Foreign Literature Publishing House. From 1952 to 1953, a member of Moscow State University's philological faculty. At present, dean of Moscow State University's department of journalism.

Themes of dissertations: *Dreiser's Path to Communism* (1951) and *Twentieth Century American Literature* (1966).

Professor Zasursky has written many works on contemporary American literature, among them the books *Twentieth Century American Literature*, *Aspects of the Literary Process*, and *Theodore Dreiser*.

Among the many problems of American literature of the twentieth century, he is most concerned with studying the work of Dreiser.

In 1969, 1971, 1974 and 1975, Y. Zasursky lectured at the following American Universities: University of Michigan (Ann Arbor),

University of Minnesota, Stanford University, State University of Indiana, University of North Carolina, University of Pennsylvania, and University of California (San Diego campus).

Zasursky's works have been translated into Bulgarian, German, Czech, Spanish (in Argentina) and Serbo-Croatian languages.

Motylyova, Tamara. A writer, journalist and pedagogue. Doctor of Philology. She has been a member of the editorial board of the journal *Inostrannaya Literatura* and *A Short Literary Encyclopaedia* since their inception. In the period of 1956-1963, she headed the department of foreign literature at the Gorky Literary Institute, in affiliation with the USSR Writers' Union. Since 1963, she has been occupied primarily with literary and scholarly work. In 1965, she edited and wrote the preface for Sinclair Lewis' *Collected Works* in nine volumes. Motylyova has also written many books and articles on foreign literature. She has examined the works of Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner in the context of the problems of twentieth century realism and Russo-Western literary contacts. In 1963, Motylyova was a member of the delegation of Soviet women to the United States. She reports her impressions of this visit in the article: "Twenty-Six Days in the USA" (1964).

Zlobin, Georgy. Literary critic, author of works on contemporary foreign literature, primarily American. Published *Contemporary American Dramaturgy* (two editions, 1964 and 1968); essays: "After the Absurd: American Dramaturgy of the Sixties", and "Problems of Styles" in *Contemporary Foreign Literature* (1971); the drama section in *The History of American Literature* (Prosveshchenie Publishers, 1971); preface to the book *Three American Tragedies* (Progress Publishers, 1973); and the introductory essay "The Frontiers of Edward Albee" in *Bessie Smith and Other Plays* (Progress Publishers, 1976). He is on the editorial board of the journals *Literaturnoye obozrenie*, and *Soviet Literature* (published in foreign languages). Since 1962 he has edited the informational critico-bibliographical collection *Modern Foreign Literature* (appearing every two months).

Landor, Mikhail. Has published most of his articles on American literature in the journal *Voprosy Literatury*. Among them are the essays: "The Centaur-Novels" (On Styron, Updike and Bellows), "The School of Sherwood Anderson" (on Anderson's influence on American prose of the period between wars), "Faulkner's Creative Method in the Making", and "Gorky on Sherwood Anderson".

In the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura* he has published: "Thomas Wolfe"; "The Great Prose of the Red Decade" (on the polemic

over the thirties in America); "The Society of Abundance and the Meaning of Life" (on American short stories); and "Roads of South" (on the publication of a Russian translation of Faulkner's *Light in August*).

He has also published a series of surveys in the magazine *Soviet Literature*, including: "Stern in Russia", and "Erskine Caldwell in the USSR".

Solovyov, Erik. Candidate of Philosophy. Employed at the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of Philosophy. He is the author of *Existentialism and Scientific Cognition* (1967) and of many essays treating, among other subjects: Kantian ethics, Dostoyevsky's religious philosophy, the aesthetic ideas of the young Marx, and conceptions of mass society in contemporary American sociology.

Orlova, Raissa. Candidate of Philology. She delivered a series of lectures in pedagogical institutes in Tallinn and Moscow and worked on the journal *Inostrannaya Literatura*. Since 1961, she has been doing literary work. She has been publishing works, largely on American literature, since 1947. Her books include: *The Heirs of Huckleberry Finn: Essays on Contemporary American Literature* (1964); *Jack London's "Martin Eden"* (1967); *Hemingway's novel: "For Whom the Bell Tolls"* (1968, translated in the USA); *Modern Foreign Progressive Literature* (1969); *Harriet Beecher Stow: Her Life and Work* (1971); *Who Raises a Sword: A Novella about John Brown* (1975); and *The Cabin That Has Been Standing for a Century* (1975). Raissa Orlova has authored over two hundred essays, prefaces and afterwords on foreign literature. She has written on the work of Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Miller and Saroyan, among American authors. Many of her works have been published in many countries and in the United States in particular.

Mendelson, Maurice. Distinguished Soviet scholar of American literary studies, Professor, Doctor of Philology. Dr. Mendelson's books *Mark Twain* and *Walt Whitman* went through three editions in revised form. He helped edit the Russian twelve-volume publication of Mark Twain's collected works. Dr. Mendelson is the author of two monographs: *The Contemporary American Novel* (1964) and *American Satirical Prose in the Twentieth Century* (1972). His book *Theodore Dreiser's "An American Tragedy"* came out in 1971.

Mendelson has written many essays on the history and problems of American literature and literary theory, among them are: "The Tragedy of Hemingway", 1962; "The Poetry of Two Camps in the American Civil War", 1964; "Twentieth Century American Literary Criticism and the Work of American Writers"; "Van

Wyck Brooks and the Democratic Tradition of American Literary Criticism", 1969; "The Legacy of the Stormy Thirties", 1969; "The Creative Development of F. Scott Fitzgerald", 1970; "What Makes the Absurd Novel an Absurdity?", 1974; "The American Novel After Hemingway, Faulkner and Steinbeck", 1975.

In 1976 Progress Publishers is putting out the English translation of Maurice Mendelson's book *The Life and Work of Walt Whitman*.

Levidova, Inna. Chief bibliographer of the State Library of Foreign Literature. Critic, translator of prose and poetry. The author of many works on American and English literature including *O. Henry and His Short Stories* (1973); essays "American Poetry of Our Times", "Restless Spirits" (on Salinger, Capote and Kerouac), "The Post-war Novels of John Steinbeck"; the preface to the Russian translation of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, and others. Compiler of an anthology of twentieth century American Negro poetry and (in collaboration with A. Zverev) of the anthology *Contemporary American Poetry*, published by Progress in 1975.

Skorodenko, Vladimir. Wrote his Candidate dissertation on contemporary English literature in 1965. Skorodenko is the academic secretary of the State Library of Foreign Literature. He has written essays on contemporary English literature and on the works of Bernard Malamud and Kurt Vonnegut.

Popov, Igor. Head of the international department of the journal *Soviet Literature*. Popov has written on modern American writers, American poetry and radio dramaturgy, as well as on Russo-American literary contacts. He has also translated many contemporary American radio plays.

Paltsev, Nikolai. Graduated from Moscow State University in 1967. Completed graduate studies in comparative literature at Moscow State University's department of philology in 1972. Since April of 1974, a senior research assistant at the State Library of Foreign Literature.

His publications on contemporary American literature and art include: "The Daily Life and Heroism of America's Unfortunates" (review of Lars Lawrence's novel *Morning, Day and Night*); "Paths Leading Up or Down?" (review of Leslie Waller's *The Banker*); "A Rebel in the Empire of Dreams: The Career of Marlon Brando"; "Ann Fairbairn's *That Man Cartwright*"; "The Writer and the Book Market in America"; "Irving Stone's *The Passions of the Mind*"; and "Joyce Carol Oates' *Do With Me What You Will*". These have appeared in the magazines *Inostrannaya Literatura*, *Novoe Uremya*, and *Souremennaya Literatura Za Rubezhom*.

Rotenberg, Tatyana. On the literary staff of the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura*. Has published essays and reviews on contemporary American literature on the work of John Gardner, Joyce Carol Oates, and Joseph Heller, among others. Rotenberg translated Joyce Carol Oates' stories.

Turovskaya, Maya. Candidate of Art History, theatre and film critic, director and scenarist. Senior research fellow of Moscow Institute of Cinema Theory and History. Together with Y. Khamnyutin, she made in Bulgaria a four-part film about American cinema called *Cinema and Its Stars*. Maya Turovskaya has also authored many articles on American literature, cinema and theatre.

Golenpolsky, Tancred. Candidate of Philology. Taught English and American literature in various higher educational institutions of the USSR; headed the laboratory of the USA of the Far East Centre of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1971-1974). Now a member of the Coordinating Council on Problems of the USA, affiliated with the USSR Academy of Sciences. Golenpolsky has translated Edward Albee, Thornton Wilder, Arthur Hailey, Carson MacCullers, James Baldwin, Robert Penn Warren into Russian. He is the author of many essays on American culture and literature.

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